

# The Longest Night

December 20, 2023



FIRST  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH  
COVINGTON, GA



# Preparing for the Word

## Gathering Music

*What Wondrous Love Is This*  
*When He Cometh*  
*Reflection*

John Carter  
George F. Root  
Douglas E. Wagner

## Prelude

*The Gift of Love*

Hal Hopson

## Welcome and Announcements

## Call to Worship

## Lighting of Advent Candles

Bill Clary, Amy Fraser, & Pat Harper

Friends, in the Advent season, we light the candle of hope. Tonight, we light it for all who feel hopeless. Tonight, this light shines bright for prisoners, for patients with chronic illness, for individuals fighting to get out of debt, for refugees waiting for a safe place to rest, and for relationships that have no clear way forward. Tonight, we light this candle for the hopeless.

**May God's hope find them now.**

In this season, we light the candle of peace. Tonight, we light the candle of peace again for all who need peace. This light shines bright for the anxious and unsettled—for those in seasons of transition and discernment, for all who struggle with mental health, and for people navigating rocky, new beginnings.

**May God's peace find them now.**

In this season, we light the candle of joy. Tonight, we light the candle of joy for all who need it. May this light shine for those who are overburdened, overstretched, worn out, and

worn down. May this candle shine for those who need a good laugh, even in seasons of grief.

**May God's joy find them now.**

In this season, we light the candle of love.

Tonight, we light the candle of love again for all who need it. May this light shine for loved ones lost, for love that has been betrayed, for love that has been neglected or forgotten, and for all who long for love and find themselves lonely.

**May God's love find them now.**

Thanks be to God.

**Amen.**

✠ **Hymn 144**

*In the Bleak Midwinter*

CRANHAM



## **The Word**

### **Prayer for Illumination**

**Creator God,**

**For so long we have been bending under the weight  
of our own grief, exhaustion, and stress.**

**However, today,**

**like a flower bending toward the sun,**

**we are leaning toward you in hope.**

**Speak a word of encouragement to us now.**

**Help us to see that we are not alone.**

**And warm our weary bones from the inside out.**

**We are listening.**

**We are bending.**

**We are seeking after you.**

**With open hearts we pray,**

**amen.**

## Scripture Reading

Isaiah 40:1-11

Judy Davis

Pew Bible page 667

## ✦ Response 121

*O Little Town of Bethlehem*

ST. LOUIS

***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.***

***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 the great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us; abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!***

## Scripture Reading

Psalms 121:1-8

Carol McGiboney

Pew Bible page 571

## Personal Reflection

*You are invited to take some time to reflect on the following questions. There is space to write out some thoughts on the back of this worship guide if needed.*

Where do you need comfort in your life?

What does weariness feel like for you this season?

What does joy feel like?

Who or what are you praying for at this moment?

## Reflection Music

*O Little Town of Bethlehem*

ST. LOUIS

Jake McCarthy, violin



# Responding to the Word

## Refrain 88

*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*

VENI EMMANUEL

***Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.***

## Candle Lighting

Written by Lisa Ann Moss Degrenia

This candle represents our suffering and the suffering of the world.  
In the light of God's love, we claim God's gift of truth.

There is no need to hide or deny. God welcomes us as we are.

**Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.**

This candle represents our suffering and the suffering of the world.  
In the light of God's love, we claim God's gift of lament.

We recognize our wounds and cry out to God.

We accept God's invitation to express every feeling and question.

**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.**

This candle represents our suffering and the suffering of the world.  
In the light of God's love, we claim God's gift of courage.

Courage to be honest, to seek help, to comfort one another.

Courage to dare to love and dream again.

**The Lord is my strength and my shield; in God my heart trusts; so I am helped, and my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to God.**

This candle represents our suffering and the suffering of the world.  
In the light of God's love, we claim God's gift of hope.

God is good. God is strong. God is near,

leading us to a day without tears and pain, without sin and death.

Healing and deliverance are coming; if not now, then on that day.

**By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation; you are the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas.**

## Prayers of Lament and Hope

*You are invited to write their prayers on a blue strip of paper and bring them to the Lord's table at this time.*

**Solo**

*O Holy Night*  
Janet Carmichael, soprano

CANTIQUE DE NOEL

✠ **Closing Prayer**

**God of my joy  
and God of my weariness,  
I have brought my worn-down heart to you today—  
a heart full of grief,  
a heart carrying fear,  
a heart, tender to the touch.**

**I have brought my weariness to you,  
because I know that you are present with me in the valley.**

**Therefore, as I prepare to leave the safety and comfort of this moment,  
as I prepare to return to the fullness of my life,  
I ask that you would continue to walk with me.**

**Stay by my side through the valley.**

**Stay by my side as I climb my way out,  
just stay close.**

**For I cannot move from weariness to joy without you.**

**With honesty and gratitude,**

**I give you these prayers of my heart—  
those named and left unnamed.**

**I give them all to you.**

**Amen.**

✠ **Closing Hymn 676**

*Day is Done*

AR HYD Y NOS

✠ **Benediction**

✠ **Postlude**

*A Trumpet Fancy*

Leon Nelson



# Worship Notes

“This service is designed to provide a space for prayer, reflection, and remembrance amidst the holiday hustle and bustle. We hope that this service can be a gift to you providing a space of calm, quiet, and healing.” A Sanctified Art LLC| Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed | sanctifiedart.org

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**How Does a Weary World Rejoice** | Liturgy by Rev. Sarah Speed | Graphic Design by Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org

## Serving Today

Tech Team | Dan Walden, Kenny Compton, Jonny Atkins, Brad Hawley, Kraig Howell



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# Worship Notes & Doodles

*We invite you to fill the space below with the thoughts, reminders, and doodles that you may be blessed with during and after worship.*

A large rectangular area filled with a grid of small, light gray dots, intended for writing notes or creating doodles. The grid consists of 12 columns and 20 rows of dots.