

*Welcome to*  
**Luther Memorial Church**  
*of the Erie Lutheran Parish*



*Blue Christmas Service*  
*8 DECEMBER 2021*

## THE MEANING OF THIS SERVICE

*This dark season of the soul can be a painful time for many people. For instance it may be the first Christmas without a loved family member who recently died; it may be a time that you struggle with your health or the health of a loved one; it may be a time that has always been difficult. The anguish of broken relationships, the Covid-19 pandemic, the insecurity of unemployment, the weariness of ill health, the pain of isolation can make us feel very alone in the midst of the celebrating and spending. And so tonight we find space and time to acknowledge our sadness and concern but know that we are not alone.*

PRELUDE – "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring"

J. S. Bach

## WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

### GREETING

- P** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,  
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
- C** And also with you.
- P** In the beginning was the Word,
- C** and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- P** In the Word was life,
- C** and the life was the light of all people.
- P** The light shines in the darkness,
- C** and the darkness has not overcome it.
- P** The Word became flesh and lived among us,
- C** and we have seen his glory, full of grace and truth.

### OPENING PRAYER

- P** Let us pray with one another.
- C** God of mercy, hear our prayer for ourselves and our families who live with memories of loss and painful present experiences. We ask for strength for tonight, courage for tomorrow and peace for the future. We ask these things in the name of Jesus, who shares our life in joy and sorrow, despair and promise, death and new birth. Amen.

### LITANY OF LAMENT

- P** Hear the cries of your people, O God.
- C** We will lament tonight and not hold back. We refuse to be comforted until we have made known to you our sorrows.
- P** Our spirits are weighed down with grief.
- C** We are drenched with tears and our hearts are so very heavy.
- P** Our eyes have failed for watching for your promise.
- C** When will you comfort us?
- P** We open our mouths and speak words of pain.
- C** Why do you stand so far off, O Lord, and hide yourself in time of trouble?
- P** We cry out and ask why has this happened in our lives?
- C** We grow weary with our groaning.
- P** Early in the morning we cry out in need.
- C** Let our cry come before you, O Lord, and deliver us according to your promise of mercy. ►

**P** O Lord, we wait for you.

**C** We wait for the hope of a new morning. Our spirits wait for you alone.

## PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

**L** In this dark season of the soul, let us now ask God for what we need as people coping with our loss, pain, suffering, loneliness, grief, and sadness.

Loving God, we come to you with the pain growing inside us. As the nights have been growing longer, so has the darkness wrapped itself around our hearts. In this season of our longest nights, we offer to you the pain and the traumas that some of us cannot put into words. Loving God, hear our prayer,

**C** and in your merciful love, answer.

*A moment of silence and reflection*

**L** Compassionate God, there are those who are grieving over what might have been. A death or loss has changed our lives, or we have lost a job, a dream, a goal, or a cause. We find ourselves adrift and alone...lost. Loving God, hear our prayer,

**C** and in your merciful love, answer.

*A moment of silence and reflection*

**L** This dark season of the soul reminds us of all that used to be and cannot be anymore. The memories of what was and the fears of what may stifle us, and cause us to experience is a sense of feeling a deep loss. Please be near us this night. Loving God, hear our prayer,

**C** and in your merciful love, answer.

*A moment of silence and reflection*

## HYMN

ELW 256

### Comfort, Comfort Now My People



1 "Com - fort, com-fort now my peo - ple; tell of peace!" So says our God.  
2 For the her-ald's voice is cry - ing in the des - ert far and near,  
3 Straight shall be what long was crook - ed, and the rough - er plac - es plain.



Com-fort those who sit in dark - ness mourn-ing un - der sor - row's load.  
call - ing us to true re - pen - tance, since the reign of God is here.  
Let your hearts be true and hum - ble, as be - fits God's ho - ly reign.



To God's peo - ple now pro-claim that God's par - don waits for them!  
Oh, that warn - ing cry o - bey! Now pre - pare for God a way.  
For the glo - ry of the Lord now on earth is shed a - broad,



Tell them that their war is o - ver; God will reign in peace for-ev - er.  
Val - leys, rise to greet the Sav - ior; hills, bow down in hum-ble fa - vor.  
and all flesh shall see the to - ken that God's word is nev - er bro - ken.

## LITURGY OF REMEMBRANCE

### LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

- P** Jesus is the light of the world.
- C** Lord, we pray for your warmth and comfort when we are in pain, your guiding light when life is dark and your bright hope when we feel despair.
- P** Jesus is the one who gives rest for all who are weary.
- C** We pray for rest.
- P** Jesus is the one who heals those who are in pain.
- C** We pray for healing.
- P** Jesus is the one who comforts those who are sad.
- C** We pray for comfort.
- P** Jesus is the one who is present to those who are lonely.
- C** We pray for presence.
- P** Jesus is the one who gives peace to those who are in turmoil.
- C** We pray for peace.

**P** The peace of the Lord be with you always.

**C** And also with you. *Romans 16:16*

### LIGHTING OF CANDLES

- L** We light these candles to remember those persons who have been loved and lost. We pause to remember their name, their face, their voice. We give thanks for the memory that binds them to us in this season of hope.
- C** May God's eternal love surround them.

*Silence*

**POETRY** – Yesterday's Pain

Kneeling in Bethlehem  
(Ann Weems, pg. 14)

### LIGHTING OF CANDLES

- L** We light these candles to redeem the pain of loss: the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, the loss of health, the loss of community. As we gather up the pain of the past, we offer it to you, O God, asking that into our open hands you will place the gift of peace.
- C** Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into your future.

*Silence*

**POETRY** – This is the Time to be Slow

John O'Donohue

### LIGHTING OF CANDLES

- L** We light these candles to remember ourselves during this dark season of the soul. We pause and remember the past weeks, months and for some of us, years of down times. We remember our heartfelt memories, the grief, the sadness, the hurts, and the pain of reflecting on our own mortality.
- C** Let us remember that dawn defeats darkness.

*Silence*

**POETRY** – Pandemic

The Rev. Dr. Lynne Unger

## LIGHTING OF CANDLES

📖 We light these candles to remember our faith and the gift of hope which God offers to us in the Christmas story. We remember that God shares our life, and promises us a place and time of no more pain and suffering.

🕯 Let us remember the one who shows us the way, and who goes with us into our tomorrow.

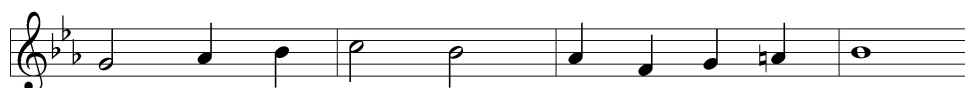
## HYMN

LBW 272

### Abide with Me



1 A - bide with me, fast falls the e - ven - tide.  
2 I need thy pres - ence ev - 'ry pass - ing hour;  
3 Swift to its close ebbs out life's lit - tle day;  
4 I fear no foe, with thee at hand to bless;  
5 Hold thou thy cross be - fore my clos - ing eyes,



The dark - ness deep - ens; Lord, with me a - bide.  
what but thy grace can foil the tempt - er's pow'r?  
earth's joys grow dim, its glo - ries pass a - way;  
ills have no weight, and tears no bit - ter - ness.  
shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies;



When oth - er help - ers fail and com - forts flee,  
Who like thy - self my guide and stay can be?  
change and de - cay in all a - round I see;  
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy vic - to - ry?  
heav'n's morn - ing breaks, and earth's vain shad - ows flee;



help of the help - less, oh, a - bide with me.  
Through cloud and sun - shine, oh, a - bide with me.  
O thou who chang - est not, a - bide with me.  
I tri - umph still, if thou a - bide with me!  
in life, in death, O Lord, a - bide with me.

Text: Henry F. Lyte, 1793–1847

Music: EVENTIDE, William H. Monk, 1823–1889



## THE WORD

### FIRST READING: Isaiah 61:1-4

<sup>1</sup>The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,  
because the LORD has anointed me;  
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,  
to bind up the broken-hearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and release to the prisoners;  
<sup>2</sup>to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,  
and the day of vengeance of our God;  
to comfort all who mourn;  
<sup>3</sup>to provide for those who mourn in Zion—  
to give them a garland instead of ashes,  
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,  
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.  
They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.  
<sup>4</sup>They shall build up the ancient ruins,  
they shall raise up the former devastations;  
they shall repair the ruined cities,  
the devastations of many generations.

**L** The word of the Lord.

**G** Thanks be to God.

### PSALM: Psalm 121 (*Read in unison*)

<sup>1</sup> I lift up my eyes upon the hills—  
from where will my help come?  
<sup>2</sup> My help comes from the LORD,  
who made heaven and earth.  
<sup>3</sup> He will not let your foot be moved;  
he who keeps you will not slumber.  
<sup>4</sup> He who keeps Israel  
will neither slumber nor sleep.  
<sup>5</sup> The LORD is your keeper;  
the LORD is your shade at your right hand.  
<sup>6</sup> The sun shall not strike you by day,  
nor the moon by night.  
<sup>7</sup> The LORD will keep you from all evil;  
he will keep your life.  
<sup>8</sup> The LORD will keep  
your going out and your coming in  
from this time on and for evermore.

## SECOND READING: Philippians 4:4-14

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. <sup>9</sup> Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

<sup>10</sup> I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup> Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. <sup>12</sup> I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. <sup>13</sup> I can do all things through him who strengthens me. <sup>14</sup> In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress.

☐ The word of the Lord.

☑ Thanks be to God.

☐ The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the eleventh chapter.

☑ Glory to you, O Lord.

## GOSPEL: Matthew 11:28-30

<sup>28</sup> ‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’

☐ The Gospel of the Lord

☑ Praise to you, O Christ.

## MEDITATION

Pastor Moran

ANTHEM – “The Lord’s Prayer”

Albert Hay Malotte

*Rose-Marie Rose, Soloist  
C. Noelle Partusch, Liturgical Dancer*

## PROCESSION TO THE BLUE CHRISTMAS TREE

*As the anthem is sung, you are invited to walk to the Blue Christmas Tree  
to receive a bow of remembrance from the tree, followed by anointing for healing through oil and prayer by  
Jeanne Gaber and Linda Graffius.*

*You are also invited to write names in the Book of Remembrance before and after  
the Blue Christmas Service.*



*(Rose-Marie Rose - soloist)*

*Weary and sad at heart, bent beneath thy load;  
Heavy is thy burden, dark is the road;  
Then, in thy loneliness, help draweth nigh;  
Jesu, kind Shepherd, will hear thy cry.*

*Beside still waters He leadeth thee;  
His love will guard thee tenderly;  
Thy grief shall pass, thy doubt shall flee;  
Beside still waters He leadeth thee.*

*Lost in the darkness, far from thy goal;  
No voice to cheer thee, none to console;  
Broken in spirit, hope seems in vain;  
Then, in thy hour of need, joy comes again.*

*Fear not, oh pilgrim, dark though the way;  
Press on and faint not; soon comes the day;  
"Lead on, kind Shepherd," this be thy prayer;  
Jesu will guide thee to pastures fair.*

**LITANY OF AFFIRMATION – First Coming**

- ℣ God did not wait until the world was ready and until all the nations were at peace.
- ✠ **God came when the Heavens were unsteady and prisoners cried out for release.**
- ℣ God did not wait for the perfect time.
- ✠ **God came when the need was deep and great. God dined with sinners in all their grime, turned water into wine.**
- ℣ God did not wait till hearts were pure.
- ✠ **In joy God came to a tarnished world of sin and doubt, to a world like ours, of anguished shame. God came and God's light would not go out.**
- ℣ God came to a world that did not mesh to heal its tangles and shield its scorn.
- ✠ **In the mystery of the Word made Flesh, the Maker of the stars was born.**
- ℣ We cannot wait until the world is sane to raise our songs with joyful voice,  
or to share our grief, to touch our pain,
- ✠ **God came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!**

*(by Madeleine L'Engle)*

**BLESSING**

- ℣ The God of hope,  
through Christ our peace,  
in the power of the Holy Spirit,  
+ bless you now and forever.
- ✠ **Amen.**

**POETRY – Into this Silent Night**

(Weems, p. 52)



## DISMISSAL

☞ Go in peace and do not be afraid!

🙏 Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE – “From Heaven Above to Earth I Come”

**Johann Pachelbel**

### — SERVING THIS EVENING —

Les Fobes – Candle Lighter

Walt Gaber – Cantor

Lee Swenson – Lector

Rose-Marie Rose – Soloist

C. Noelle Partusch – Liturgical Dance

Linda Graffius and Jan MacInnes – Worship Leaders

Jeanne Gaber and Linda Graffius (Faith Community Nurses) - Annointers

Marilyn Rositer – Poetry Reading

Pastor Brian Moran – Liturgical Leader



*Thank you to those who led us in worship this evening, and a special thanks to you for being a part of our liturgy this evening. Thank you for your strength and willingness to hear the love and comfort and hope which comes from the Lord.*



### MY FIRST CHRISTMAS IN HEAVEN

I see the countless Christmas trees  
Around the world below,  
With tiny lights, like heaven's stars,  
Reflecting on the snow.

The sight is so spectacular,  
Please wipe away that tear.  
For I'm spending Christmas  
With Jesus Christ this year.

I hear the many Christmas songs,  
That people hold so dear,  
But the sounds of music can't compare,  
With the Christmas choir up here.

For I have no words to tell you,  
The joy their voices bring.  
For it is beyond description,  
To hear an angel sing.

I can't tell you of the splendor,  
Or the peace here in this place.  
Can you just imagine Christmas,  
With our Savior, face to face?



I'll ask Him to light your spirit,  
As I tell Him of your love;  
So then pray for one another,  
As you lift your eyes above.

Please let your heart be joyful,  
And let your spirit sing.  
For I'm spending Christmas in Heaven,  
And I'm walking with the King!

I know how much you miss me;  
I see the pain inside your heart.  
But I'm not so far away,  
We really aren't apart.

So be happy for me, dear ones,  
You know I hold you dear,  
And be glad I'm spending Christmas  
With Jesus Christ this year.

I send you each a special gift  
From my heavenly home above.  
I send you each a memory  
Of my undying love.

After all "love" is the gift,  
More precious than pure gold.  
It was always most important  
In the stories Jesus told.

Please love and keep each other  
As my Father said to do,  
For I can't count the blessings  
Or the love He has for you.

So have a Merry Christmas and  
Wipe away that tear.  
Remember I'm spending Christmas  
With Jesus Christ this year!

*by Wanda Bencke*