

Welcome to
Luther Memorial Church
of the Erie Lutheran Parish



Blue Christmas Service
13 DECEMBER 2023

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

Please stand as you are able.

CALL TO WORSHIP

- P** Tonight the earth tilts and tips, its axis pulling this half of the world away from the sun.
- C** **These nights are long.**
- P** The shadows lengthen. The darkness lingers. Those we love don't always notice, but it's true:
- C** **These nights are long.**
- P** Tonight, we bring to God what weighs on us in the small hours.
- C** **These nights are long.**
- P** This gathering darkness is not a threat but a shelter, a time to name what is true: Sometimes joy doesn't come easily.
- C** **Yet God still meets us.**
- P** Sometimes merriness is not within reach.
- C** **Yet God still meets us.**
- P** Sometimes despair doesn't depart at dawn.
- C** **Yet God still meets us.**
- P** Come, bring your whole selves to God.
- C** **God's arms are open wide.**

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.**

Please be seated.

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.

Please stand as you are able.

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.

Text: Johann G. Olearius, 1635–1711; tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1827–1878, alt.
Music: FREU DICH SEHR, *Trente quatre psaumes de David*, Geneva, 1551

LITURGY OF REMEMBRANCE

LIGHTING OF TWO ADVENT CANDLES

- 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.**

Please be seated.

LIGHTING OF CANDLES

☒ We light this candle 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.

☑ **May God's eternal love surround them.**

Silence.

POETRY – Yesterday's Pain

Kneeling in Bethlehem
(Ann Weems, pg. 14)

LIGHTING OF CANDLES

☒ We light this candle 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.

☑ **Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into your future.**

Silence.

POETRY – Toward the Light

The Rev. Dr. Lyanne Unger

LIGHTING OF CANDLES

☒ We light this candle 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.

☑ **Let us remember that dawn defeats darkness.**

Silence.

POETRY – This is the Time to be Slow

John O'Donahue

LIGHTING OF CANDLES

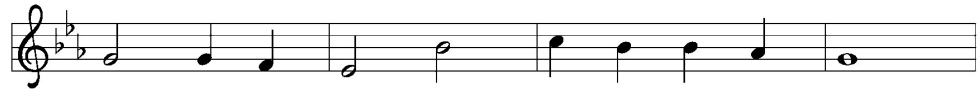
- 📖 We light this candle to remember our faith and the gift of hope which God offers to us in the Christmas story. We remember that God shares our life, and promises us a place and time of no more pain and suffering.
- 📖 **Let us remember the one who shows us the way, and who goes with us into our tomorrow.**

Please stand as you are able.

HYMN

Abide with Me

ELW 629



1 A - bide with me, fast falls the e - ven - tide.
2 Swift to its close ebbs out life's lit - tle day;
3 I need thy pres - ence ev - 'ry pass - ing hour;
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.
earth's joys grow dim, its glo - ries pass a - way;
what but thy grace can foil the tempt - er's pow'r?
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,
change and de - cay in all a - round I see;
Who like thy - self my guide and stay can be?
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.
O thou who chang - est not, a - bide with me.
Through cloud and sun - shine, oh, a - bide with me.
I tri - umph still, if thou a - bide with me!
in life, in death, O Lord, a - bide with me.

Please be seated.

THE WORD

FIRST READING: Isaiah 61:1-4

¹The 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;
² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
³ 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.
⁴ 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.

☐ The word of the Lord.

☑ Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 121 (*Read in unison*)

¹ **I lift up my eyes upon the hills—
from where will my help come?**
² **My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.**
³ **He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.**
⁴ **He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.**



- ⁵ **The LORD is your keeper;
the LORD is your shade at your right hand.**
- ⁶ **The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.**
- ⁷ **The LORD will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.**
- ⁸ **The LORD will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time on and for evermore.**

SECOND READING: Romans 8:31-39

³¹ What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³²He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.'
³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Please stand as you are able.



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

☑ **Glory to you, O Lord.**

GOSPEL: Matthew 11:28-30

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

☐ The Gospel of the Lord

☑ **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Please be seated.

MEDITATION

Pastor Lundwall

ANTHEM – “The Lord’s Prayer”

Albert Hay Malotte

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

PROCESSION TO THE BLUE CHRISTMAS TREE

As the “Wait for the Lord” 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.

Repeat as led by the Holy Spirit

ELW 262

Wait for the Lord

Musical notation for the hymn "Wait for the Lord". The score is written for a single voice part on a treble clef staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The melody consists of a series of quarter notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. The lyrics are: "Wait for the Lord, whose day is near." The final note is a whole note G4. The bass line consists of a series of quarter notes: G3, A3, B3, C4, B3, A3, G3. The final note is a whole note G3. There is a small black triangle at the end of the bass line.

Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!

Text: Taizé Community
 Music: WAIT FOR THE LORD, Jacques Berthier, 1923-1994
 Text and music © 1984 Les Presses de Taizé, GIA Publications, Inc., agent, 7404 S. Mason Ave., Chicago, IL 60638.
 www.giamusic.com. 800.442.3358. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

POETRY – Into this Silent Night

Weems, p. 52

ANTHEM – "Beside Still Waters"

Bernard Hamblen

(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 – Adapted from “First Coming” Madeleine L’Engle

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

Please stand as you are able.

BLESSING

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

DISMISSAL

- P** Go in peace and do not be afraid!
C **Thanks be to God.**

POSTLUDE – “From Heaven Above to Earth I Come”

Johann Pachelbel

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.

— **SERVING THIS EVENING** —

Pastor Jay Mitchell – Liturgical Leader

Les Fobes – Candle Lighter

Walt Gaber – Cantor

Linda Graffius and Jan MacInnes –Worship Leaders

Rose-Marie Rose – Soloist

Liturgical Dance – C. Noelle Partusch

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

Lee Swenson – Lector

Marilyn Rositer – Poetry Reading



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