



*The Longest Night Service*  
*December 21, 2024*

**Zion United Methodist Church**

*2109 Seaford Road, Seaford, Virginia 23696*

Prelude

Welcome

† Call to Worship

L: In the beginning there was darkness, but God came into the darkness and created light.

**P: God saw that the light was good, and separated the light from the darkness.**

L: While held in captivity in Egypt, God offered salvation for the oppressed, for all of God's people.

**P: God said, "I have also heard the groaning of the Israelites, and I have remembered my covenant."**

L: The prophets have declared that through our Lord, there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light."

**P: Those who lived in a land of deep darkness - on them light has shined.**

L: Out of the darkness of night came a host of angels declaring the good news -

**P: "Do not be afraid; for see - I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day a Savior, who is the Messiah the Lord."**

† Hymn

*It Came upon the Midnight Clear*

UMH #218

Pastoral Prayer

**First Reading: Ecclesiastes 3:1-11** - For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: <sup>2</sup>a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; <sup>3</sup>a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; <sup>4</sup>a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; <sup>5</sup>a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; <sup>6</sup>a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; <sup>7</sup>a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; <sup>8</sup>a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace. <sup>9</sup>What gain have the workers from their toil? <sup>10</sup>I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with. <sup>11</sup>He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

*Please remain seated while offering the Psalter response.*

*Psalm 22*

L: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, so far from the words of my groaning?

**P: O my God, I cry by day but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.**

L: In you, our ancestors trusted. They trusted and you delivered them.

**P: It was you who brought me from the womb, you who kept me safe on my mother's breast. Since my mother bore me, you have been my God.**

L: Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

**P: God does not despise the affliction of the afflicted. God does not hide from me. When I cry to God, God hears me. Thanks be to God.**

**Second Reading: Isaiah 40:1-2, 27-31** - Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. Why do you say, O Jacob, and assert, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God"? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does

not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted, but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

SPECIAL MUSIC

*A Christmas Meditation*  
Sherry Wornom and Tara Thomas

arr. by: Tim Doran

**LITANY of REMEMBRANCE**

*Lighting of the first candle*

L: We light this first candle to remember those whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember clearly, their faces, their voices, their bodies. We embrace and give thanks for the memories that bind them to us in this season of expectation, when all Creation waits for the Light.

**P: We remember them with love. May God's eternal love surround them.**

**O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel  
That mourns in lonely exile here, until the son of God appear  
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

*A period of silent reflection & then the lighting of the second candle*

L: We light this second candle to remember the pain of loss: loss of relationships, loss of trust, loss of jobs, loss of health, loss of faith, the loss of joy. We acknowledge and embrace the pain of the past, O God, and we offer it to You, asking that into our wounded hearts and open hands You will place the gift of peace, shalom.

**P: We remember that through You all things are possible.  
Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into Your future.**

**O come thou Wisdom from on high, who orderest all things mightily  
To us the path of knowledge show, and teach us in her ways to go  
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

Hymn

*What Child Is This*

UMH #219

*A period of silent reflection & then the lighting of the third candle*

L: We light this third candle to remember ourselves this Christmas time. We pause and remember the past weeks, months, and for some of us years, that have been heavy with our burdens. We accept and lay before you, God, the sharpness of memory, the sadness and grief, the hurt and fear, the anger and pain. We accept and lay before you the ways we feel we have fallen short, and the times we have spent blaming ourselves, and you, for all that we have suffered. We accept and lay before you the time we have walked alone, in darkness; and in knowledge of our own mortality.

**P: We remember that though we have journeyed far, and that, while lost, we may have turned away from the light, the light itself has not failed. We remember that though winter be upon us and though the night be dark, with the turning of the wheel the dawn will come, and dawn defeats the darkness.**

**O come thou day-spring, come and cheer our spirits by thy advent here  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put to flight  
Rejoice, rejoice Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

*A period of silent reflection & then the lighting of the fourth candle*

L: We light this fourth candle to remember faith, the gift of light and hope that God offers to us in the stories of Hanukkah and of Christmas, which both also began in abandonment, insecurity, and humbleness, in a time of war and in a poor stable. We remember that the loving God who kept the light shining in the temple and who came to share this life with us promises us comfort and peace.

**P: We remember the One who shares our burdens, who shows us the way to the Light, and who journeys with us into all our tomorrows.**

**O come desire of nations, bind in one the hearts of all mankind  
Bid then our sad, divisions cease, and be thyself our King of Peace  
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

Hymn

*Away in a Manger*

UMH #217

Scripture Reading – **Luke 2:1-7** – In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

L: This is the Word of God, for us, the people of God.

**P: Thanks be to God.**

Message

*Christ Comes in the Darkest Hour*

Rev. David Magruder

**CALL TO & PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

L: Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord!

**P: Lord, hear my voice.**

L: If you, Lord, were to remember all our sins,

**P: Lord, who could endure?**

L: But there is forgiveness with you, that you may be revered.

**P: With the Lord there is never-ending love, and with God is boundless power to redeem.**

**PRAYER – God of Mary and Joseph, become flesh for us at Bethlehem: we confess that we have allowed your story of redemption to be distorted and disfigured. We have welcomed a fragile myth of your manger, and ignored the doubt, fear and pain into which you were born. We have given Mary a halo, and forgotten her terror. We have bathed your stable in glorious light, while darkness stalked the streets of Bethlehem. By the power of your Holy Spirit, free us from our fragile myths, and speak to us the true Word of Incarnation. We pray in the name of Christ, who taught us to say as we pray, “Our Father, who art in Heaven...” Amen.**

Word of Pardon

Anointing of Healing Oil

† Hymn

*Silent Night, Holy Night*

UMH #239

† Dismissal with Blessing