

Spruce Run Evangelical Lutheran Zion Church

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Rev. Chris Halverson, Pastor

Longest Night Service

December 21, 2021

PRELUDE

WELCOME

On this longest night of the year, near the end of the season of Advent, a season of yearning and hope, anticipating Christmas—so many of us find ourselves confronting losses and griefs of all sorts: -the first, or perhaps the 5th, or 50th, Christmas without a spouse or child or sibling or friend.

-Retired and no longer invited to office parties.

-moved in but just not settled.

We find ourselves confronted by grief and metaphoric, as well as literal, long nights.

It can feel like our whole society is Christmas-mad, insisting we fit into a joyful pattern when that's not where we're at. I hope this Longest Night service is a time and place where all of us are given a spiritual space to grieve and to be as we are.

OPENING DIALOGUE

Almighty God grant us a quiet night and peace at the last.

Amen.

By day, O God,

you grant your steadfast love,

And at night your song is with me,

a prayer to the God of my life.

A LITANY OF REMEMBERING

We come this night to our Advent wreath, not forgetting hope, peace, joy, and love, but recognizing there are times when we can only anticipate them, only yearn for them. We light these four candles in honor of our loved ones and to name our losses.

<Pause>

We who despair light this first candle, may we be held by hope.

Light Candle

There are so many ways we try to hide our hurt and ignore that empty spaces in our life. A conspiracy of silence, denial, avoidance, overwork, substance abuse.

Help us, Dear Lord.

<Pause>

We who are in distress light this second candle, may we find peace.

Light Candle

It hurts so much! We are like a lonely city, it tastes like bitter gravel, all that is sacred is a desolate tomb.

Help us, Dear Lord.

<Pause>

We who are filled with sorrow light this third candle, may joy seep in.

Light Candle

We tumble and twist, hands outstretched like we're on a balance beam, the edge of a cliff, enduring an earthquake.

Help us, Dear Lord.

<Pause>

We who grapple with loss light this fourth candle, may we be uplifted by love.

Light Candle

We remember those we love, all those blessed moments with them, remember too those that were mundane and even painful. At this time, let us name aloud or in silence those people whom we loved, and all that we have lost.

Silence

All of it we bring before you.

Help us, Dear Lord.

PSALMODY

And now let us pray together the 23rd Psalm:

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

**He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.**

**He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.**

**Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;**

**for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.**

**You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.**

**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.**

WORD

Isaiah 40:1-11

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.

A voice cries out:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass.

The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!"

See, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

Romans 8:15b-26

For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ — if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.

John 11:32-35

When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep.

HOMILY

HYMN: LBW# 34

"Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel"

Verses 1 & 2



- 1 Oh, come, oh, come, Em - man - u - el, and ran - som cap - tive
- 2 Oh, come, oh, come, great Lord of might, who to your tribes on
- 3 Oh, come, strong Branch of Jes - se, free your own from Sa - tan's
- 4 Oh, come, blest Day - spring, come and cheer our spir - its by your
- 5 Oh, come, O Key of Da - vid, come, and o - pen wide our



Is - ra - el, that mourns in lone - ly ex - ile here
Si - nai's height in an - cient times once gave the law
tyr - an - ny; from depths of hell your peo - ple save
ad - vent here; dis - perse the gloom - y clouds of night,
heav'n - ly home; make safe the way that leads on high,



un - til the Son of God ap - pear.
in cloud, and maj - es - ty, and awe.
and give them vic - t'ry o'er the grave. Re - joi - ce! Re - joi - ce!
and death's dark shad - ows put to flight.
and close the path to mis - er - y.



Em - man - u - el shall come to you, O Is - ra - el.

PRAYERS

Let us pray together.

Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work or watch or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, comfort the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for your love's sake. Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

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. Amen

BENEDICTION

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord's face shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord look upon you with favor and + give you peace. **Amen.**

HYMN: LBW# 65

“Silent Night”

All Verses



Stil - le Nacht, hei - li - ge Nacht! Al - les schläft,
1 Si - lent night, ho - ly night! All is calm,
2 Si - lent night, ho - ly night! Shep - herds quake
3 Si - lent night, ho - ly night! Son of God,



ein - sam wacht nur das trau - te, hoch - hei - li - ge Paar.
all is bright round yon vir - gin moth - er and child.
at the sight; glo - ries stream from heav - en a - far,
love's pure light ra - diant beams from your ho - ly face,



Hold - er Kna - be im lok - ki - gen Haar, schlaf in himm - li - scher
Ho - ly In - fant, so ten - der and mild, sleep in heav - en - ly
heav'n - ly hosts . . . sing, al - le - lu - ia! Christ, the Sav - ior, is
with the dawn of re - deem - ing grace, Je - sus, Lord, at your



Ruh, schlaf in himm - li - scher Ruh.
peace, sleep in heav - en - ly peace.
born! Christ, the Sav - ior, is born!
birth, Je - sus, Lord, at your birth.

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, yearning for Peace.

Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE