

**December 18, 2024**  
**Longest Night**

### **Introduction**

The winter solstice is the longest night and the beginning of winter in the northern hemisphere.

In a few days many of us will gather to celebrate the Nativity of Our Lord, the arrival of Jesus Christ, God in human form. December 25 is celebrated as Christmas because it had been incorrectly identified as the winter solstice. What the early Christians intended for this feast was not a birthday party for baby Jesus but rather a feast of proclamation. God arrives by way of deep darkness. Christians wanted to tell the world that God, the maker of the cosmos, chose to lovingly draw near to our broken world by way of a human birth on the longest night of the year. God's love for us goes deep and does not fade or change with the seasons. It is richer and more plentiful than the darkness of night, blazing brighter than the noonday sun of late June.

For many, the lack of daylight intensifies other suffering. The weight of depression grows heavier when light is scarce. We get stressed out when our calendars fill with extra social obligations. We fear interactions with family members that have been difficult in the past. What an opportunity, then, to share that the message of Christmas is specifically sent for those in pain and suffering. It is not that "all is merry and bright." Rather, it is the abiding truth that God seeks to be with us, even when we are "blue."

While it is true that our preindustrial forebears had legitimate reasons to be afraid of the dark, it is also true that we repeat racist binaries that have led to the violent deaths of people of color when Christians associate darkness with pain and lightness with healing. A night like this and a feast like Christmas are fruitful encounters with healing darkness. God-with-us is here to guide us into paths of love and practices of justice.

### **PRELUDE**

### **WELCOME**

### **GREETING**

The light of our Lord Jesus Christ, the warmth of God,  
and the hope of the Holy Spirit be with you all.  
**And also with you.**

### **NIGHT HYMN: 'Twas in the Moon of Wintertime (ELW 284)**

1 'Twas in the moon of wintertime  
when all the birds had fled,  
that \*God the Lord of all the earth  
sent angel choirs instead;  
before their light the stars grew dim,

and wond'ring hunters heard the hymn:

*Refrain*

Jesus your king is born! Jesus is born,  
in excelsis gloria!

2 Within a lodge of broken bark  
the tender babe was found;  
a ragged robe of rabbit skin  
enwrapped his beauty round;  
but as the hunter braves drew nigh,  
the angel song rang loud and high: *Refrain*

3 The earliest moon of wintertime  
is not so round and fair  
as was the ring of glory on  
the helpless infant there.  
The chiefs from far before him knelt  
with gifts of fox and beaver pelt. *Refrain*

4 O children of the forest free,  
the angel-song is true;  
the holy child of earth and heav'n  
is born today for you.  
Come, kneel before the radiant boy,  
who brings you beauty, peace, and joy. *Refrain*

**DIALOGUE**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

We give you thanks, O God, for in the beginning you called light into being, and you set lights in the sky to govern night and day. In a pillar of fire by night you led your people into freedom. Enlighten our darkness by the light of your Christ; may your Word be a lamp to our feet and a light on our path; for you are merciful and you love your whole creation, and with all your creatures we give you glory, through your Son, Jesus Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

**Amen.**

**PRAYER**

Let us pray.

Creator of the stars of night, bless the long hours of this night with the warmth of your presence. Come to all who suffer in any way. Grant rest to the weary, freedom to those who are burdened, and bright hope to those who despair. Strengthen us as we await your coming once again, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

**PSALM: Psalm 27**

<sup>1</sup>The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

<sup>2</sup>When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh – my adversaries and foes – they shall stumble and fall.

<sup>3</sup>Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.

<sup>4</sup>One thing I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.<sup>5</sup>For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock.

<sup>6</sup>Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD.

<sup>7</sup>Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me!

<sup>8</sup>"Come," my heart says, "seek his face!"

Your face, LORD, do I seek. <sup>9</sup>Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation! <sup>10</sup>If my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will take me up.

<sup>11</sup>Teach me your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.

<sup>12</sup>Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence.

<sup>13</sup>I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. <sup>14</sup>Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

**SONG: *Of the Father's Love Begotten* (ELW 295)**

1 Of the Father's love begotten  
ere the worlds began to be,  
he is Alpha and Omega,  
he the source, the ending he,  
of the things that are, that have been,  
and that future years shall see,  
evermore and evermore.

2 Oh, that birth forever blessed,  
when the virgin, full of grace,  
by the Holy Ghost conceiving,  
bore the Savior of our race,  
and the babe, the world's redeemer,  
first revealed his sacred face,

evermore and evermore.

- 3 This is he whom seers in old time  
chanted of with one accord,  
whom the voices of the prophets  
promised in their faithful word;  
now he shines, the long-expected;  
let creation praise its Lord  
evermore and evermore.
- 4 Let the heights of heav'n adore him;  
angel hosts, his praises sing;  
pow'rs, dominions, bow before him  
and extol our God and King;  
let no tongue on earth be silent,  
ev'ry voice in concert ring  
evermore and evermore.
- 5 Christ, to thee, with God the Father,  
and, O Holy Ghost, to thee,  
hymn and chant and high thanksgiving  
and unwearied praises be:  
honor, glory, and dominion,  
and eternal victory  
evermore and evermore! Amen.

**FIRST READING: Isaiah 40:1-11**

<sup>1</sup>Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.

<sup>2</sup>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.

<sup>3</sup>A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. <sup>4</sup>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.

<sup>5</sup>Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

<sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. <sup>8</sup>The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.

<sup>9</sup>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!"

<sup>10</sup>See, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. <sup>11</sup>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.

### **SECOND READING: Revelation 22:1-5**

<sup>1</sup>Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup>through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

<sup>3</sup>Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; <sup>4</sup>they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup>And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

### **GOSPEL: John 1:1-5**

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

<sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup>in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

### **PASTORAL REFLECTION**

#### **PRAYERS**

Hear my prayer, O Lord;  
**listen to my cry.**

*Silence for reflection.*

Keep me as the apple of your eye;  
**hide me in the shadow of your wings.**

*Silence for reflection.*

In righteousness I shall see you;  
**when I awake, your presence will give me joy.**

*Silence for reflection.*

O Lord, support us all the day long of this troubled life, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes and the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then, in your mercy, grant us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

#### **LORD'S PRAYER**

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray.

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours,  
now and forever. Amen.

#### **BLESSING**

May God bless you and keep you.

May God's holy darkness enfold you and grant you rest.

May God nourish a seed of hope among us.

**Amen.**

#### **SENDING SONG: *Though the Earth Shall Change* (ACS 1035)**

Though the earth shall change,  
though the mountains tremble,  
though the waters rage,  
you, God, are here.

Though the nations war,  
though the peoples battle,  
though the empire falters,  
we will not fear.