

SERVICE FOR THE LONGEST NIGHT

Monday, December 21, 2020
Gathering via Zoom at 7:00 P.M.

The First Presbyterian Church
of Howard County



We are glad you are gathering with us on this Winter Solstice.

In order to make your worship more meaningful, you may want to collect a few resources and create a home worship space. Here are a few ideas: your home Advent Wreath or four candles set in a circle; a bowl of water to serve as your Bowl of Tears; paper, crayons, markers, pen to draw or write during our Silence for Reflection; candle(s) to light during our Time of Remembrance; matchstick/lighter.

For Meditation as you gather for worship:

*By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

Luke 1:78-79

*I shall look at the world through tears. Perhaps I shall see things
that dry-eyed I could not see.*

Nicholas Wolterstorff



A TIME TO GATHER

Gathering Music

Welcome and Call to Worship

*Come among us, God.
You who cast the planets into space
and cradle the sparrow in her nest.
Come, God, and meet us here.*

*Come among us, God.
You who bless the poor and the broken
and stand by the sad and the strong.
Come, God, and meet us here.*

*Come among us, God.
You who dance in the silence
and shine in the darkness.
Come, God, and meet us here.*

*Come to this place, you who are weary; it is open to you.
Come to this place, you who long for safe haven.
Come to this place, you who are resilient;
the grace of God is with you.*

Placing the Bowl of Tears

*As a symbol of the memories of those loved and lost,
and of the cares and burdens carried,
we place this bowl of tears in this special place.*

Lighting the Advent Candles

We light the candles in silence.

Prayer for Light

May God be with you

And also with you

*O faithful and loving God,
we praise you for your generous love for all creation.
You are the God of peace, comfort and healing.*

Bless us who see the light of this wreath.

**In the days when we feel far from your promises,
be patient with us, we pray,
as we wait for aching to ease
and long for hope to unfold in our lives.**

Amen.

Song 90

Wait for the Lord

Taizé

Wait for the Lord whose day is near.
Wait for the Lord; be strong, take heart!



A TIME OF PRAYER

First Lesson: Psalm 85:8-13

- ⁸ Let me hear what God the Lord will speak,
for he will speak peace to his people,
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.^[a]
- ⁹ Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.
- ¹⁰ Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.
- ¹¹ Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
and righteousness will look down from the sky.
- ¹² The Lord will give what is good,
and our land will yield its increase.
- ¹³ Righteousness will go before him,
and will make a path for his steps.

Prayer

*God of hope,
you call us from exile and speak peace to us;
your steadfast love supports us;
your justice shines on us.
You come to us and blaze a pathway home.
Comfort us with the expectation of your saving power,
made known to us in the Child of Peace, Jesus Christ.
Amen.*

Silence for Reflection

Song 820

Nothing Can Trouble

Taizé

Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten.
Those who seek God shall never go wanting.
Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten.
God alone fills us.



Second Lesson: Isaiah 11:1-9

- 11** A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
- ² The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
- ³ His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
- ⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
- ⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.
- ⁶ The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.
- ⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
- ⁸ The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
- ⁹ They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.

Prayer

*Laboring God, you are clearing a holy space
where hurt and destruction have no place.*

**Clear our lives of hatred and despair,
and sow seeds of joy and peace,
so that shoots of hope may spring forth
and we may live in harmony with one another.
Amen.**

Silence for Reflection

Song 466

Come and Fill Our Hearts

Taizé

Come and fill our hearts with your peace.
You alone, O Lord, are holy.
Come and fill our hearts with your peace.
Alleluia!



Third Lesson: Luke 2:8-14

⁸ In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

Prayer *(together)*

**God of fear,
God of the night,
God of the expectation,
You visited shepherds in the night
with songs and sights of joy.
In all of our nights,
turn us towards hope, because
hope might just
keep us alive.
Amen.**

Silence for Reflection

Song

God to Enfold You

Iona Community

God to enfold you, Christ to uphold you,
Spirit to keep you in heaven's sight;
so may God grace you, heal and embrace you,
lead you through darkness into the light.



A TIME OF REMEMBRANCE

A Candle Liturgy of Remembering

Scripture Reading: John 1:1-5

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life,^[a] and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

...The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

You are my lamp, O Lord. My God lightens my darkness.

This God is my strong refuge and has made my way safe.

Lighting of Candles



*As we sing, candles will be lighted in the Sanctuary,
and we invite you to light a candle or candles in your home,
in remembrance of a loved one,
for yourself, or for a place of brokenness in the world.*

*As we light the candles, please join in singing these simple songs as a way of praying
outwardly or in your heart.*

294 – Within Our Darkest Night

Within our darkest night,
you kindle the fire that never dies away,
never dies away.
Within our darkest night,
you kindle the fire that never dies away,
never dies away.

654 – In the Lord I'll Be Ever Thankful

In the Lord I'll be ever thankful,
in the Lord I will rejoice!
Look to God, do not be afraid;
lift up your voices, the Lord is near;
Lift up your voices, the Lord is near.

*When all have had time to light candles,
we will conclude with this prayer:*

All our laughter, all our sadness
Safe now in God's hands.

All our anger, all our gladness
Safe now in God's hands.

All our stories, all our memories
Safe now in God's hands.

Those we remember, those we love
Safe now in God's hands.

Prayers for a Hurting World

...We lift them to you, O God.
May they know the deep peace of Christ.

Prayer for Christ's Coming

Weep with us as you wept with Mary and Martha.
Come, Lord Jesus.

*You know the cold and hunger of a stable;
now share our loneliness.*
Come, Lord Jesus.

*You know the power of our enemy death;
now comfort and sustain us.*
Come, Lord Jesus.

Make your home with us and share our load.
Come, Lord Jesus.

*You are the Child of righteousness,
risen with healing in your wings.*
Come, Lord Jesus.
**Give us life and light through even the longest night
and bring us to your joy in the morning.**

JESUS CHRIST: BIRTH

109 Blest Be the God of Israel

Song of Zechariah



1 Blest be the God of Is - rael, who comes to set us free;
 2 God from the house of Da - vid a child of grace has given;
 3 On those who sit in dark - ness the sun be - gins to rise,



who vis - its and re - deems us, who grants us lib - er - ty.
 a Sav - ior comes a - mong us to raise us up to heaven.
 the dawn - ing of for - give - ness up - on the sin - ner's eyes.



The proph - ets spoke of mer - cy, of free - dom and re - lease;
 Be - fore him goes the her - ald, fore - run - ner in the way,
 God guides the feet of pil - grims a - long the paths of peace.



God shall ful - fill that prom - ise and bring the peo - ple peace.
 the proph - et of sal - va - tion, the har - bin - ger of day.
 O bless our God and Sav - ior with songs that nev - er cease!

This 20th-century British paraphrase of the Song of Zechariah (Luke 1:68–79) broadens the implications of what John the Baptist's father says in order to affirm that God's work is ongoing. The tune is named for the composer's oldest sister, who was his first piano teacher.

TEXT: Michael Pery, 1973, alt.
 MUSIC: Hal H. Hopson, 1983
 Text © 1973 The Jubilate Group (admin. Hope Publishing Company)
 Music © 1983 Hope Publishing Company

MERLE'S TUNE
 7.6.7.6.D

Closing Responses

*For loving the world and knowing our names,
Thank you God.*

*For strength that fills us and your love that heals us
Thank you God.*

*For your presence with us this night,
and for your hand that leads us tomorrow,
Thank you God.*

Blessing

Postlude



*After the worship service concludes,
please linger on Zoom for a time of conversation and fellowship.*

*Thank you for coming tonight.
May the peace of the Child of Peace be with you this holiday season.*

Worship Leaders

Dr. Sue Lowcock Harris, Co-Pastor
Dr. O. Morton Harris, Jr., Co-Pastor
Virginia Callegary, Director of Christian Education
Matthew May, Director of Music Ministries

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