

**BETHESDA LUTHERAN
CHURCH OF MALMO**



**Tuesday, December 21, 2021
Longest Night – A Blue Christmas Evening Prayers**

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.

SILENT MEDITATION

GREETING

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

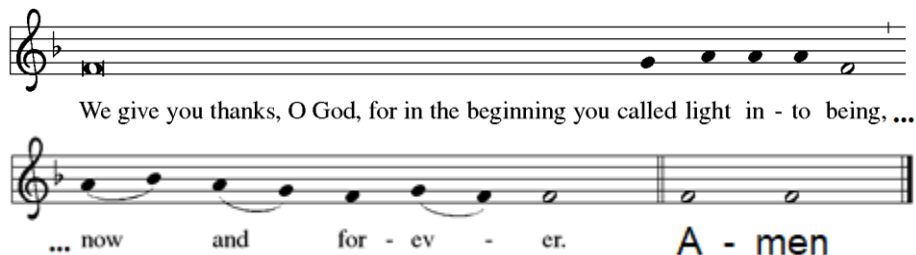
And also with you.

GATHERING SONG: "Lay Me Low"

Lay me low, _____ where the Lord can find me. _____ Lay me
 Lay me low, _____ where the Lord can find me. _____
 low, _____ where the Lord can hold me. _____ Lay me
 — Lay me low, _____ where the Lord can hold me. _____
 low, _____ where the Lord can bless me. _____ Lay me
 — Lay me low, _____ where the Lord can bless me. _____
 low, _____ Lord, lay me low. _____ Lay me
 — Lay me low, _____ Lord, lay me low. _____

THANKSGIVING FOR LIGHT PP. 310-311 ELW

The Lord be with you. And al- so with you.
 Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
 It is right to give our thanks & praise



PSALM 27 (*Responsively*)

The LORD Is My Light and My Salvation

¹ The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

² **When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell.**

³ Though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.

⁴ **One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple.**

⁵ For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock.

⁶ **And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me: therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the Lord.**

⁷ Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice: have mercy

also upon me, and answer me.

8 When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.

9 Hide not thy face far from me; put not thy servant away in anger: thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.

10 When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.

11 Teach me thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies.

12 Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies: for false witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty.

13 I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

14 Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.

PRAYER

Creator of the stars of night,
bless the long hours of this night with the warmth of your presence. **C**ome to all who suffer in any way. **G**rant rest to the weary, freedom to those who are burdened, and bright hope to those who despair. **S**trengthen us as we await your coming once again, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **A**men.

FIRST READING ISAIAH 40:1-11

1 “Comfort, comfort my people,” says your God.

² “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Tell her that her sad days are gone and her sins are pardoned. Yes, the LORD has punished her twice over for all her sins.”

³ Listen! It’s the voice of someone shouting, “Clear the way through the wilderness for the LORD! Make a straight highway through the wasteland for our God!

⁴ Fill in the valleys, and level the mountains and hills. Straighten the curves, and smooth out the rough places.

⁵ Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. The LORD has spoken!” ⁶ A voice said, “Shout!” I asked, “What should I shout?”

“Shout that people are like the grass. Their beauty fades as quickly as the flowers in a field. ⁷ The grass withers and the flowers fade beneath the breath of the LORD. And so it is with people. ⁸ The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever.”

⁹ O Zion, messenger of good news, shout from the mountain tops! Shout it louder, O Jerusalem. Shout, and do not be afraid. Tell the towns of Judah, “Your God is coming!” ¹⁰ Yes, the Sovereign LORD is coming in power. He will rule with a powerful arm. See, he brings his reward with him as he comes.

¹¹ He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in his arms, holding them close to his heart. He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young.

HYMN: “COMFORT, COMFORT NOW MY PEOPLE”
#256 ELW

SECOND READING REVELATION 22:1-5

¹Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²through 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. ³Nothing 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; ⁴they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵And 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.

HYMN: “OF THE FATHER’S LOVE BEGOTTEN”
(VS. 1,2,5) #295 ELW

THIRD READING JOHN 1:1-5, 14

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. ⁴In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. ¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

REFLECTION

PRAYERS

You may come forward to light a candle, and/or...

- You are welcome to write a prayer request on paper provided and place it in a Prayer Basket for the Pastor only to read.
- You are invited to come forward to receive prayer with laying on of hands.
- Remain in your seat and pray silently.

SILENCE

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.

HYMN "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" (vs. 1,5,6,7)
#257 ELW

DISMISSAL

The peace of Christ be with you all.

And also with you.

SERVING THIS NIGHT

Pastor: Rev. James Muske

Parish Nurses: Darlene Christensen

Music: Jim Christensen