



FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN
Ann Arbor | Michigan



Longest Night: A Service of Comfort and Hope

December 20, 2015
5:00 & 7:00 p.m.

Gathering

GATHERING MUSIC

Noel Nouvelet
Still, Still, Still
O Little Town of Bethlehem
O Come, O Come, Emmanuel
Infant Holy, Infant Lowly
Greensleeves
Silent Night

Place a carnation amongst the dead sticks. This arrangement will be visible to those who enter for Christmas Eve services.

WELCOME

Rev. Melissa Anne Rogers

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Tonight, we gather here in this place of refuge,

All: for we are lost, we are lonely, we are afraid.

One: Tonight, we gather daring to wonder if God has indeed come in Jesus,

**All: discerning the rejection we have known,
intimate with our failed relationships,
holding our heartache in hands of tenderness.**

One: Tonight, we gather with neighbors and strangers,
a family made one by our brokenness,

All: coming with our hearts full of hope, and our pockets filled with doubts.

One: Tonight, we gather just as we are,

All: for God has promised to meet us here and to welcome us for who we are.

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH

The candles will be lit by Henry and Billie Johnson at 5:00 p.m. and Sharon and Dallas Dort at 7:00 p.m.

One: We light our first candle, a single light that the deepest darkness cannot conquer – small and insignificant, yet a sign of hope.

All: Let it speak to us of the tiny flame of hope buried within us, the stubborn little light that refuses to be extinguished by all that life has thrown at it.

One: We light our second candle, a companion to the first – equally small, equally insignificant, but witnessing to hope that another light brings.

All: Let it speak to us of the light from companionship of our families, our friends and of strangers, of kindnesses found in unexpected places that restore our hope in human nature.

One: We light our third candle, recalling nights of watching and waiting, anxious nights without sleep, when dawn seemed to ebb further from the horizon and hope seemed forlorn.

All: Let it speak to us of the sureness of morning, of the passing of darkness of suffering, and the promise of an eternal sunrise dawning for those we have loved and lost. Let it speak of the light dawning too for us – though we may yet be in that darkest hour before the dawn.

One: We light our fourth candle, marking the closing of the Advent season and the immediacy of Christmas. It is a time of peace and joy we may not ourselves feel able to welcome – as our spirits dwell in dark and wintriness.

All: Let it speak to us of hope, of being together in this place of healing and wholeness, of our companionship this night at the turning of the year. Let it speak of faith that we and those we have loved and lost are held eternally in the hand of the One who brought light into being, and who knows each one of us by name.

* HYMN 797

We Cannot Measure How You Heal

YE BANKS AND BRAES

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Generous and gracious God, we look to you for compassion. Sin's shadows and death's darkness are around us. We know the pain of loss, the confusion of uncertainty, and the fear of the future. Overwhelmed by our burdens we easily forget that you never leave us alone and that your steadfast love for us never falters. By coming together we find assurance and comfort that we do not suffer this longest night alone. Forgive us when we have neglected to reach out to those whose night is also long. Grant that we may be your healing presence in their lives by bringing them your compassion and comfort that will assure them that they do not grieve alone.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

SONG

O Little Town of Bethlehem (stanza 3)

**How silently, how silently, the wondrous Gift is giv'n;
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His Heav'n.
No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.**

Proclaiming

OLD TESTAMENT READINGS

Psalm 22

One: 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?

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

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

**All: It was you who took me from the womb,
you who kept me safe upon my mother's breast;
since my mother bore me, you have been my God.**

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

All: 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!

Isaiah 9:2

Lamentations 3:1-3, 19-26

NEW TESTAMENT READING John 1:1-5; 9:5

MEDITATION

Responding

GIVING OUR GIFTS

Offering Music

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

REMEMBERING OUR LOVED ONES

All are invited to take the flame from the candle of love - which cannot be extinguished by death - and light a votive for the person/persons they mourn.

Music of Remembrance

Still, Still, Still

THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION

Invitation to the Lord's Table

Rev. Rogers

Great Prayer of Thanksgiving

Rev. Dr. Fair (5:00)

Rev. Sanderford (7:00)

The 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 debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Words of Institution

Communion of the People

All communion chalices and cups for pew communion contain only non-alcoholic grape juice. Communion will be served by intinction. Beginning with the front rows, worshipers are invited to come forward by the center aisle, receive bread and dip it in the chalice, partake, and return to their seats by a side aisle. Those unable to come forward will be served where they are seated.

Communion Music

Joseph Went A'Walking

Prayer

I Wonder as I Wander

Charles Miller

Unison Prayer After Communion

On this long dark night we await the coming of Christ. We long for the light of his presence, with us and in us. When our souls are deeply troubled, and our hearts break with the weight of sorrow, may our grief be seasoned with love, and our sorrow be buoyed by hope. In our times of God-forsakenness and estrangement, may we gaze on the innocent One, made perfect through suffering and see in him our vulnerable God, who saves in weakness and pain. May our suffering empty us of pride, and lead us to true joy, our only security, in Christ the infinite depths of God's grace.

Sending

* HYMN 314

Longing for Light, We Wait in Darkness

CHRIST BE OUR LIGHT

* BENEDICTION

* POSTLUDE

He Is Born

* Please stand in body or spirit.

Those parts of the service of worship in which the congregation participates in word or song are noted in bold type.

Prayer is available with a Stephen Minister at the communion table after the service.

Please stay and join us for hot cider and cookies in the vestibule, provided by our Stephen Ministers.

Ushers are Sharon Sheldon and Paul Kirton at 5:00 p.m., and Linda Koopmann, Kathy Wirstrom, Deanne Woodruff at 7:00 p.m. **Readers** are Cary Tripp, Jim Clark, and Evonne Plantinga at 5:00 p.m., and Catherine Kendall, Michele Derr, and Kathy Wirstrom at 7:00 p.m. **Communion Servers** are Linda Koopmann, Gale Redding, Cyndy Colton, and Don Redding at 5:00 p.m., and Marita Servais, Carol Gottliebsen, Nancy Fox, and Martha Kershaw at 7:00 p.m. **Cookie bakers** are Linda Koopmann, Linda Lampman, and Martha Kershaw.

Musical leadership is provided by Carol Muehlig, Associate Music Director and Organist; Deborah Gabrion, harpist; and Deborah Rebeck Ash, flutist.

The Call to Worship was written by Thom Shuman and posted on *Lectionary Liturgies* (<http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.ca>). **The Confessional Prayer** was written by Quentin Chin, in *Our Longest Night: A Service of Hope at Christmas Time*, posted on the United Church of Christ website (<http://www.ucc.org>).



Into This Silent Night

Into this silent night
As we make our weary way
We know not where;
Just when the night becomes its darkest
And we cannot see our path;
Just then is when the angels rush in,
Their hands full of stars.

– Ann Weems

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Christmas Eve Worship:

Family Worship and Christmas Pageant, 3:00 p.m.

Candlelight Service of Lessons & Carols, 5:00 and 7:00 p.m.

Candlelight Communion Service, 11:00 p.m.

Please be considerate in parking choices as many visitors join us for worship on Christmas Eve. Hillel (1429 Hill Street), Sigma Delta Tau (1405 Hill Street), and Kappa Alpha Theta (1414 Washtenaw Avenue) have granted the use of their parking lots. We also recommend the Forest Street sparking structure, (650 S. Forest Avenue), a short walk down Forest Court, for our able-bodied members.

Childcare will be provided at the 3:00, 5:00 and 7:00 p.m. Christmas Eve services by reservation only. If you need childcare for any of these services, please contact Debbie MacVey or the Church Office. If you or your family are able to give the young families of this church the gift of providing childcare during one of these services, please contact Debbie MacVey.

It is tradition for children to bring a gift of new socks and underwear in any size to the 3:00 p.m. Christmas Pageant. These gifts are given to the House-by-the-Side-of-the-Road for distribution to families in need.

The 2015 Christmas Eve offering will be sent to Hope Medical Clinic in Ypsilanti and will be directed toward improving access to mental health services. Our gifts will enable patients to see trained therapists, counselors and social workers.

Join us for “Joy to the World” – A Festival of Carols and Hymns for Christmas on Sunday, December 27, at 10:00 a.m. Come early and enjoy coffee and fellowship. Rev. Béghin will give the homily. There are no other worship services that day. Childcare will be provided for crib through age five.

The church building will be closed December 25, 26, and 28, and January 1.

Year-End Finance Information: If you have not yet turned in your financial commitment for 2016, please do so today. Cards are available in the Office and may be dropped through the mail slot of the Finance Office. Pledges also may be made online at firstpresbyterian.org. The IRS requires that we close our books for 2015 on December 31. Make sure you allow sufficient time for your donation to reach the office for your contribution to be applied to your 2015 statement. If the Finance Office door is locked, use the mail slot. When paying your financial commitment with a credit/debit card, the commitment is for one calendar year, and must be renewed each year. A new authorization form is available on the First Pres website or in the Finance Office. 2016 envelopes will be available for pickup in the Finance Office beginning December 27.

Struggling with mental illness in your family? First Pres staff and members facilitate a support group for family members who have loved ones coping with mental illness. The group meets twice per month. For more information, contact Rev. Rogers.