



The Longest Night

Affirming God's Presence in Darkness and in Light

December 21, 2022 + 7 PM

Welcome to The United Methodist Church of Berea!

As followers of Jesus Christ, who reveals a God whose love knows no boundaries, we are committed to welcoming and affirming every person as a beloved child of God. Every person—of every sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, age, economic status, health, ability, or any other identifying label—is welcome to participate fully in our ministries and life together as church. We hope The United Methodist Church of Berea will become a home for you, your family, and your friends as together, in our relationship with God, with each other, and with all creation, **we make and mature disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.**

Centering Music

Words of Welcome

+ Call to Worship

We cry out to the Lord, who counts and collects all our tears.

Lord God, be with us now.

In our grief, in our loneliness, in our uncertainty, and in our pain,
our bodies and spirits cry out to God.

Hear us, O Lord, and come quickly, we pray. Amen.

+ Hymn

“Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus”

UMH 196

***Come thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;
from our sins and fears release us, let us find our rest in thee.
Israel’s strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.***

***Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a king
born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all sufficient merit, raise us to thy glorious throne.***

Tune: Rowland H. Pritchard, 1830; harm. From The English Hymnal, 1906 /
Text: Charles Wesley, 1744 / Public Domain

Prayer

The days are short. The nights are long.

***Lord, the world you have created mirrors the reality of our hearts,
revealing your gracious spirit that mourns with us in grief,
cries with us in sorrow, sits with us in despair.***

***You are not a distant God, removed from human pain,
but a faithful companion, closer to us than our tears.***

***Help us to feel your presence now as we remember and reflect,
seeking your healing touch and the hope promised and delivered
in Jesus Christ, your Holy Child. Amen.***

Poem

“I Will Light Candles this Christmas”

Howard Thurman

I will light candles this Christmas,
candles of joy despite all the sadness,
candles of hope where despair keeps watch,
candles of courage for fears ever present,
candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,
candles of grace to ease heavy burdens,
candles of love to inspire all my living,
candles that will burn all year long.

Lighting of Candles

We light our first candle to remember those whom we have loved and lost.

We pause to remember clearly their faces, their voices, their bodies.

We embrace and give thanks for the memories that bind them to us in this season of anticipation
when all Creation waits for the light of God’s presence.

We remember them with love. May God’s eternal love embrace them.

Silent reflection

We light our second candle to remember the pain of loss:
loss of relationships, loss of trust, loss of jobs, loss of health, loss of faith, loss of joy.
We acknowledge and embrace the pain of the past, and we offer it to God,
asking that into our wounded hearts and open hands,
God will place the gift of peace, *shalom*.

***We remember that with you, O God, all things are possible.
Refresh, restore, and renew us. Lead us toward your future.***
Silent reflection

We light our third candle to remember ourselves on this longest night.
We pause and remember the past weeks, months, and—for some of us—years
that have been heavy with too many burdens.
We accept and lay them before God: the sharpness of memory, the sadness and grief,
the hurt and fear, the anger and pain.
We accept and lay before God the ways we feel we have fallen short
and the time we have spent blaming ourselves or God for all that we have suffered.
We accept and lay before God the time we have walked alone.

***We remember that though winter is upon us and the night is dark,
yet the dawn will come again and so, too, newness of life like spring.***
Silent reflection

We light our fourth candle to remember faith: the gift of light and hope that God offers to us
through so many stories in our scriptures, in our tradition, and in our own lives.
We remember that God's presence and love often have been felt
in seasons of abandonment, insecurity, violence, and oppression.
We remember that the same loving God who kept the light shining
in the temple and in a barn in Bethlehem
still comes to share life with us and promises peace.

***We remember the One who shares our burdens, who shows us the way,
who stays with us both in darkness and in light.***
Silent reflection

Hymn

Faith Is Patience in the Night

TFWS 2211

During the hymn, you are invited to light a candle on the table at the front of the center aisle, giving expression to whatever burden, grief, sorrow, loneliness, or other experience brings you to this time of worship. You are welcome to speak aloud the name of a person or experience as you light a candle, as you pray, and as we receive these moments together to reflect, to be still, and to know the presence of God who is with us, both in darkness and in light.

***Faith is patience in the night, waiting for the morning light,
never giving up the fight. Spirit God give us faith.***

***Faith is laughter in our pain, joy in pleasures that remain,
trust in one we can't explain. Spirit God give us faith.***

***Faith is steadfast will to live, standing firm and positive,
being ready still to give, Spirit God give us faith.***

***Faith is courage under stress, confidence in hopelessness,
greatest gift we can possess. Spirit God give us faith.***

Tune: John D. Horman / Text: Mary Nelson Keithahn / © 2000, Abingdon Press /
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Psalms 61 and 62 (NRSV)

Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer.

From the end of the earth I call to you, when my heart is faint.

Lead me to the rock that is higher than I;

for you are my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy.

Let me abide in your tent forever, find refuge under the shelter of your wings.

For God alone my soul waits in silence; from the Lord comes my salvation.

God alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall never be shaken.

Psalm 139 (NRSV)

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night,"

even the darkness is not dark to you;

the night is bright as day, for darkness is as light to you.

Psalm 23 (NRSV)

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 forever.***

Meditation

+ Hymn

My Life Flows On (How Can I Keep from Singing)

TFWS 2212

My life flows on in endless song, above earth's lamentation.

I hear the clear, though far-off hymn that hails a new creation.

No storm can shake my inmost calm while to that Rock I'm clinging.

Since love is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?

Through all the tumult and the strife, I hear that music ringing.

It finds an echo in my soul. How can I keep from singing?

No storm can shake my inmost calm while to that Rock I'm clinging.

Since love is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?

What though my joys and comforts die? I know my Savior liveth.

What though the darkness gather round? Songs in the night he giveth.

No storm can shake my inmost calm while to that Rock I'm clinging.

Since love is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?

The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart, a fountain ever springing!

All things are mine since I am his! How can I keep from singing?

No storm can shake my inmost calm while to that Rock I'm clinging.

Since love is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?

Text & Tune: Robert Lowry / Public Domain

Prayers of the People

Invitation to the Table

The Great Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you. *And also with you.*

Lift up your hearts. *We lift them up to the Lord.*

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. *It is right to give our thanks and praise.*

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere
to give thanks to you, almighty God, creator of heaven and earth.
From the silence before creation, your Word spoke all that is into being.
*You saw the darkness and called forth light, dividing day from night,
giving each its name and your blessing.*

We rejected your blessing, choosing to control rather than care,
to consume rather than cultivate,
to turn away from your light and turn your darkness into a hiding place.
*Still, you choose to bless and redeem us, calling us into renewed fellowship
through prophets, leaders, servants, and saints.*

And so, with them—with all your people on earth and all of creation—
we praise your name and join your unending hymn:
*Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.*

Holy are you, and blessed is your Word in Jesus Christ.
From the darkness of a barn, you brought forth light into the world.
Christ carried your light into every darkened corner,
calling those kept in darkness to rejoice in your enduring love.
*By the baptism of Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection,
you gave birth to your church, delivered us from slavery to sin and death,
and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.*

On the night before he died, Jesus took bread, gave thanks to you,
broke the bread, gave it to the disciples, and said:
"Receive, eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this to remember me."

When the supper was over, Jesus took the cup, again gave thanks to you,
gave it to the disciples, and said:
"Receive, drink; this is the new covenant, given for you and for all. Do this to remember me."

And so, in remembrance of these and all your mighty acts in Jesus Christ,
we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice,
in union with Christ's offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith:
Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here and on these gifts of bread and wine.
Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be Christ's light for the world.
By your Spirit, make us one with Christ, one with each other,
and one in ministry to all the world,
until Christ comes in final glory, and we feast together at your table.
*Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ, in the unity of your Holy Spirit,
all honor and glory are yours, almighty God, now and forever. Amen.*

The Lord's Prayer

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be your 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.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
forever. Amen.*

Sharing the Bread and Cup Anthem

In the Bleak Midwinter

UMH 221

*In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,
earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,
in the bleak midwinter, long ago.*

*Our God, heaven cannot hold him, nor earth sustain;
heaven and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign.*

*In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed
the Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ.*

*Angels and archangels may have gathered there,
cherubim and seraphim thronged the air;
but his mother only, in her maiden bliss,
worshipped the beloved with a kiss.*

*What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
if I were a Wise Man, I would do my part;
yet what I can I give him: give my heart.*

Text: Christina G. Rossetti, 1872 (Lk. 2.8-14), / Tune: Gustav Holst, 1906 / Public Domain

Prayer following Communion

*Almighty God, we thank you for your constant love and presence.
We know that even when we cannot perceive or feel you, yet still you are here.
Help us to remember you and to listen for your voice
in the words of family, friends, and strangers.
Kindle our hearts and awaken our hope, that we may know you as you reveal yourself
in the world and in our lives.
Call our attention to your extraordinary presence in ordinary places and persons.
Let the light of your Holy Spirit shine like these candles,
lighting the way for all who are despairing, lost, or feeling forgotten,
and grant that it may come to dwell so deeply in our hearts
that when we leave this place, it may shine on,
for us and for those whom we meet along the way. Amen.*

*Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
the darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.*

*Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away;
change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.*

*I need thy presence every passing hour.
What but thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who, like thyself, my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.*

*I fear no foe, with thee at hand to bless;
ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if thou abide with me.*

*Hold thou thy cross before my closing eyes;
shine through the gloom and point me to the skies.
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
in life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.*

Tune: W.H. Monk, 1861/ Text: Henry F. Lyte, 1847 (Lk. 24:29) / Public Domain

+ Benediction

May Christ, the life—the life that is the light for all people—shine in your heart.
No matter how small, how dim, may that light stubbornly shine.
The darkness shall not overcome it.
With courage to face the coming days, with hope, with God by your side,
may the peace of Christ be with you.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

Closing Music

Join us in worship, this week and every week:

Sunday at 9AM in-person in the Sanctuary and online (www.facebook.com/umcberea/videos)

Sunday at 11AM in-person in Wesley Hall

Monday—Friday at 9AM (Morning Prayer) via Zoom
(1-888-788-0099, meeting id: 518 014 483; passcode: 170)



Christmas Eve Worship Services

Saturday, December 24

4 PM Traditional Worship Service with Choirs,
Sanctuary & online at facebook.com/umcberea

7 PM Modern Worship with Praise Band,
Sanctuary

11 PM Traditional Worship, Sanctuary

*Invite your family members, friends, and neighbors,
and join us as we celebrate the gift of God's presence
with us in Jesus Christ with beautiful music,
a message of hope, and the traditional passing of
candlelight while we sing "Silent Night."*

Christmas Day

Sunday, December 25

9 am in the Sanctuary

10:45 am at the Renaissance
(26376 John Road, Olmsted Falls 44138)

*Join us as we sing carols, read scripture, and
celebrate the ongoing gift of Incarnation,
Emmanuel, God-with-us.*

All Are Welcome!



Artwork by Tessa Canterbury