

**ST. JOHN LUTHERAN CHURCH &
BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH**
Quiet Christmas
December 14, 2025 – 4pm



Parts in **bold** are spoken by all.

WELCOME

Welcome, you who ache and do not know why.

Welcome, you who are weary of loneliness.

Welcome, you who battle with chronic pain in your bodies or chronic despair in your minds.

Welcome, you riddled with anxiety around every corner.

Welcome, you in transition and you starving for change.

Welcome, you who feel the weight of debt and shame.

Welcome, you at the beginning of a diagnosis.

Welcome, you at the end.

Welcome, you, friend or family of anyone carrying these loads.

Welcome, skeptic. Welcome, purpose-needer.

Welcome, you who cannot recognize yourself.

Welcome, you who have lost love, who have lost hope,
who have lost faith in a good God.

Welcome, all of you...every part of you...into this space.

Let us be together, here and now.

britneywinnlee.com

CALL TO WORSHIP

It takes faith beyond imagining to have come to hear this story
if you are living things too difficult to be made sense of by an
ancient memory of angels and wise men.

It takes faith beyond imagining to have come to hear this story when you know that it will be a greater miracle than any virgin birth for love to be born right now in our world.

The alleluias we sing today will not be to drown out the world's truths that would deny them;
but to pray they will hold us in their faith.

**So we gather the bewildered, the broken hearted,
the fragile and the hopeful, the faithful and the faithless
because all we have left when we stand in the world's
darkness is this longing for love to be born once again.**

~ written by Cheryl Lawrie

GATHERING SONG

“O Come O Come, Emmanuel”

ELW #257, v.1, 5-8

- ¹ O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.

Refrain

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.

- ⁵ O come, O Key of David, come,
and open wide our heav'nly home;
make safe the way that leads on high,
and close the path to misery. *Refrain*
- ⁶ O come, O Dayspring, come and cheer;
O Sun of justice, now draw near.
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadow put to flight. *Refrain*

7 O come, O King of nations, come,
O Cornerstone that binds in one:
refresh the hearts that long for you;
restore the broken, make us new. *Refrain*

8 O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear. *Refrain*

CALL TO CONFESSION

Dear Lord, we come to you this day to express our failures and confusion regarding our relationship with you:

You know that we come to you with heavy hearts that we find hard to unburden. It is particularly in this time of year when the darkness of long solstice nights collides with the brilliance of Christmas lights, that we find it hard to express our losses.

We may be confused, sad, lonely, and feeling our losses without remembering that you are always there to support us. We tend even toward anger at you, Lord, because we feel in some way it is your will that we are unhappy. Sometimes we feel cut off from you because we allow our many hurts to engulf us. We lack trust in you.

Open us to the understanding that you are the source of all love and we need not feel so alone in our grief. Grant us wisdom to know that you—most of all—can be trusted, and that you are with us, especially when we are at our absolute worst.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Hear the good news of the psalmist's proclamation:

**If I say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me,
And the light around me will be night,"**

Even the darkness is not dark to God, and the night is as bright as the day.

**The God who promised never to leave us or forsake us HAS
come to us in Jesus Christ**

who binds up the brokenhearted.

heals all our infirmities,

and relieves our burden of sin.

So arise, shine; for your light has come,

And the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. Thanks be to God!

~ from Advent Longing for the Light of Healing (inspired by Psalm 139:11-12, Isaiah 60:1)

FIRST READING: Isaiah 40:1-11

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. 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.

A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 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. Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

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. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. 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!" See, the Lord GOD comes with might, and God's arm rules for God; God's reward is with God, and God's recompense before God. God will feed God's flock like a shepherd; God will gather the lambs in God's arms, and carry them in God's bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

RESPONSIVE PSALM

Consider and answer me, O Lord my God;
lighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death;
lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him"
– lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.

**We come to you O Lord, seeking answers to our questions.
We come to you O God, because you are the Creator.**

But I have trusted your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.
I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.

**We come looking for a song to sing;
We wait for your voice to call us from beyond our fear.**

(inspired by Psalm 13: 3-6)

SONG "In the Bleak Midwinter"

ELW #294

¹ 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.

² Heaven cannot hold him,
nor earth sustain;
heav'n and earth shall flee away
when he comes to reign;
in the bleak midwinter
a stable place sufficed
the Lord God almighty,
Jesus Christ.

³ 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.

SECOND READING: Revelation 22:1-5

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 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. 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; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 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.

ADVENT WREATH LITANY: BLUE CHRISTMAS

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

**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.**

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

**Let it speak to us of the lights of companionship –
of our families and our friends –
of strangers
and kindnesses found in unexpected places
that restored our hope in human nature.**

We light our third candle
recalling nights of watching and waiting –
sleepless, anxious –
when dawn seemed to ebb further from the horizon
and hope seemed forlorn.

**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.
and dawning too for us –
though we may yet be in that darkest hour before the dawn.**

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

**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 –
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.**

~ from Blue Christmas Service on the Wellsprings website.

SONG

“Wait for the Lord”

ELW#262

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

GOSPEL: John 1:1-5

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

SERMON

Pastor Gary Johnson, Bethlehem Lutheran Church (retired)

SONG "Come Now O Prince of Peace" ELW#247

- 1 Come now, O Prince of peace, make us one body.
Come, O Lord Jesus, reconcile your people.
- 2 Come now, O God of love, make us one body.
Come, O Lord Jesus, reconcile your people.
- 3 Come now and set us free, O God, our Savior.
Come, O Lord Jesus, reconcile all nations.
- 4 Come, Hope of unity, make us one body.
Come, O Lord Jesus, reconcile all nations.

THE LIGHTING OF THE CANDLES & HEALING RITUAL WITH OIL
You are invited to come forward to light a candle for yourself or a loved one. If you chose, you may then also be anointed with oil. This anointing on your forehead is a very old gesture used to give strength on the journey of being healed and healing others. After people have returned to their seat, the following prayer will be offered:

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

In the spirit of this season
let us now confidently ask our God
for all the good things we need:
For ourselves
as we participate in this Christmas
coping with our many different losses.
God, hear our prayer.
And in your mercy, answer.

For our families and friends,
that they may continue to help and support us.
God, hear our prayer.
And in your mercy, answer.

For any person we have loved who has died,
for all the losses we know in our lives,
that all may be redeemed by your Easter promise.
God, hear our prayer.
And in your mercy, answer.

For our family and friends,
that you may bless them with love, peace, and joy.
God, hear our prayer.
And in your mercy, answer.

For peace throughout the world
as proclaimed by the Christmas Angels
on that faraway hillside.
God, hear our prayer. **And in your mercy, answer.**

For greater understanding of the lessons of love and acceptance
as taught by Jesus your Christ.
God, hear our prayer. **And in your mercy, answer.**

God of great compassion and love,
listen to the prayers of these your people.
Grant to all,
especially the bereaved and troubled ones this Christmas,
the blessing we ask in the name of Jesus,
who taught us to pray,

~ from a complete Blue Christmas liturgy ("When Christmas Hurts") posted on The Young Clergywoman Project

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.

LESSING/BENEDICTION

A new day is dawning!

Despite what we see and hear in the world around us,
the sunrise is coming.

When it comes, it will break through the darkness of our world—
darkness caused by violence and death and hunger and despair.
And all those who now sit huddled in the shadows will be able to
rise and walk with confidence in the light. So go from here with
courage and hope, to love and serve the Lord. **Amen.**

SENDING SONG “Silent Night, Holy Night!” ELW#281

¹ Silent night, holy night!
All is calm, all is bright
round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
sleep in heavenly peace,
sleep in heavenly peace.

² Silent night, holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight;
glories stream from heaven afar,
heav'nly hosts sing, alleluia!
Christ, the Savior, is born!
Christ, the Savior, is born!

3 Silent night, holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light
radiant beams from your holy face,
with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at your birth,
Jesus, Lord, at your birth.

DISMISSAL

Look for the light and there you will find love
For love refuses to be extinguished by despair!

Pastor Gary Johnson - Bethlehem Lutheran Church (retired)
Pastor Brian Julin-McCleary - St. John Lutheran Church
Steve Peters, Minister of Music - St. John Lutheran Church