



December 21, 2021

7:00 p.m.

Words of Welcome

Prelude

“Silent Night”

arr. Robert Lau

Call to Worship

Today we come looking for the Christ Child.

**We come, bringing our hurts, our worries, our fears.**

We come seeking relief from pain. With the psalmist of old we say,

**“O Lord, you are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.**

**Give heed to my cry, for I am brought very low.”**

Hymn

"Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence"

- 1 Let all mortal flesh keep silence, and with fear and trembling stand;  
ponder nothing earthly minded, for with blessing in his hand  
Christ our God to earth descendeth, our full homage to demand.
- 2 King of kings, yet born of Mary, as of old on earth he stood,  
Lord of lords, in human vesture, in the body and the blood,  
he will give to all the faithful his own self for heavenly food.
- 3 Rank on rank the host of heaven spreads its vanguard on the way,  
as the Light of light descendeth from the realms of endless day,  
that the powers of hell may vanish as the shadows clear away.
- 4 At his feet the six-winged seraph, cherubim, with sleepless eye,  
veil their faces to the presence, as with ceaseless voice they cry,  
“Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, Lord most high!”

Prayer of Confession

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 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

Let us open our lives to God's healing presence  
and receive our Lord's acceptance of us!

**We know, God of Love,  
that you are always with us even in our very darkest of times.  
We know that you forgive our many transgressions  
and that by leaning into your infinite patience and strength,  
we receive your mercy, your care, and your grace today. Amen.**

#### Prayer for Illumination

#### First Lesson: Isaiah 35:1-10 *followed by silent reflection*

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,  
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;  
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing.  
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.  
They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God.  
Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees.  
Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God.  
He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense.  
He will come and save you.'  
Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;  
then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.  
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert;  
the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water;  
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,  
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.  
A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way;  
the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people;  
no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray.  
No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;  
they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there.  
And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing;  
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;  
they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

#### Psalter: Psalm 126 *followed by silent reflection*

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.  
Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy;  
then it was said among the nations, 'The LORD has done great things for them.'  
The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.  
Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb.  
May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.

Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing,  
shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.

Gospel Lesson: Luke 1:68-79 *followed by silent reflection*

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.  
He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David,  
as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,  
that we would be saved from our enemies  
and from the hand of all who hate us.  
Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors,  
and has remembered his holy covenant,  
the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham,  
to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies,  
might serve him without fear,  
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.  
And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,  
to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.  
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.”

Meditation *followed by silent reflection*

Rev. Carter

Intercession for Healing

The God of strength moves within us;  
**the God of courage hears our distress.**  
The God of hope reveals wholeness to us;  
**the God of healing touches us when we are broken.**  
When the pain overwhelms us, when the burden is too heavy,  
**we turn to our God, who is sustaining and redeeming.**  
When there is loneliness, when there is isolation,  
**we turn to our God, who is loving and present.**  
For God created us, redeemed us and sustains us,  
**and we are not alone.**  
**Lead us in your ways, O God, and bring us your healing touch.**

The Lighting of the Candles

*All are invited to light a candle on the communion table  
in recognition of the losses and struggles of the season.*

Prayers of the People

Unison Prayer

**God of mercy, hear our prayer in this Advent season for ourselves,  
and for our families and friends who live with the struggles of illness  
and the pain of loss. We ask for strength for today, courage for tomorrow,  
and peace for the past. We ask these things in the name of Christ,  
who shares our life in joy and sorrow, death and new birth, despair and  
promise. Amen.**

Hymn

"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

- 1 O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,  
that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.
- 5 O come, thou Key of David, come, and open wide our heavenly home;  
make safe the way that leads on high, and close the path to misery.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.
- 6 O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer our spirits by thine advent here;  
disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put to flight.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.
- 7 O come, Desire of nations, bind all peoples in one heart and mind;  
bid envy, strife, and discord cease; fill the whole world with heaven's peace.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

Benediction

May the power and the mystery go before us, to show us the way,  
shine above us to lighten our world,  
lie beneath us to bear us up,  
walk with us and give us companionship,  
and glow and flow within us to bring us joy.

**Amen.**

The peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you always.

**And also with you.**

Postlude

"In the Bleak Mid-Winter"

arr. Gordon Young

**Participants in Tonight's Service**

Rev. Bill Carter, pastor of First Presbyterian of Clarks Summit, PA

Rev. Jim Thyren, Honorably Retired

Judy Cutler, liturgist

Frank Jones, director of music, Clarks Summit, PA

Kay Ten Eyck, organist, Clarks Summit, PA

Tonight's service is drawn from the work of the Presbyterian Health Network, and credited to Jane Givens, parish nurse from Kalamazoo, MI. We have also drawn from materials by Kathy Escobar's *A Weary World: Reflections for a Blue Christmas*, and the Book of Common Worship.