

St. Philip's Episcopal Church
Light for the Longest Night
December 21, 2020
7:00 PM



The Right Reverend Rob Skirving, Bishop
The Reverend Eric Mills, Rector
The Reverend Deacon Pam Hayes
The Reverend Bill Eberle, Preacher

During “the most festive time of year” the nights grow longer as the days grow shorter and there are many of us who are touched in various ways and in differing degrees by loneliness, grief, and depression. We may feel compelled to “put on a happy face” that is not in synch with our heart.

During this service you are invited to be as you are, knowing that however you feel or do not feel, there is understanding and acceptance for you in the heart of God who loves you beyond imagining.

You are invited to participate in this service to whatever degree you feel comfortable or desire.

Light for the Longest Night

Celebrant: Let us pray:

God of love and understanding, we come this evening as we are. We bring with us all our emotions, some we can identify with ease, others that defy definition, some sharp and searing, others numbing or discomforting. Amid the flickering lights, the promised joy and peace of this season can elude us, but we are here tonight, to gather in prayer, prayer sometimes with sighs too deep for words. Grant us an awareness of your presence with us in all times and in all seasons, whatever our moods and feelings. May your word that echoes through the scriptures—“Fear not! I am with you”—resound within our souls and let this service of music, lessons and light anoint us with healing that comes through your Son by the power of your holy and life-giving Spirit.

People: Amen.

Celebrant: Light and Peace in Jesus Christ our Lord

People: Thanks be to God

Celebrant: If I say, “Surely the darkness will cover me, and the light around me turn to night, “ darkness is not dark to you, O Lord; the night is as bright as the day; darkness and light to you are both alike.

Let us pray:

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility, that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

People: Amen.

WORD AND LIGHT

The First Candle on the Advent Wreath is lighted

Celebrant: This candle represents our grief.

Deacon: We acknowledge the pain of losing loved ones, of dreams that go unfulfilled, of hopes that evaporate in despair.

A Reading from Jeremiah. (14:9,22)

Lord, you are in the midst of us, and we are called by your Name: Do not forsake us, O Lord our God.

Silence

Officiant: Lord, be present with us in our loss.

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

The Second Candle on the Advent Wreath is lighted

Celebrant: This candle represents our courage.

Deacon: It symbolizes the courage to confront our sorrow, to comfort each other, to share our feelings honestly with others, and to dare to hope in the midst of pain.

A Reading from Psalm 139

1 Lord, you have searched me out and known me; *
you know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar.

2 You trace my journeys and my resting places *
and are acquainted with all my ways.

3 Indeed, there is not a word on my lips, *
but you, O Lord, know it altogether.

4 You press upon me behind and before *
and lay your hand upon me.

5 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; *
it is so high that I cannot attain to it.

6 Where can I go then from your Spirit? *
where can I flee from your presence?

7 If I climb up to heaven, you are there; *
if I make the grave my bed, you are there also.

8 If I take the wings of the morning *
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

9 Even there your hand will lead me *
and your right hand hold me fast.

10 If I say, "Surely the darkness will cover me, *
and the light around me turn to night,"

11 Darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day; *
darkness and light to you are both alike.

12 For you yourself created my inmost parts; *
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

13 I will thank you because I am marvelously made; *
your works are wonderful, and I know it well.

14 My body was not hidden from you, *
while I was being made in secret and woven in the depths of the earth.

15 Your eyes beheld my limbs, yet unfinished in the womb;
all of them were written in your book; *
they were fashioned day by day, when as yet there was none of them.

16 How deep I find your thoughts, O God! *
how great is the sum of them!

17 If I were to count them, they would be more in number than the sand; *
to count them all, my life span would need to be like yours.

Silence

Celebrant: Lord, amid difficulty strengthen our hearts.

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

The Third Candle on the Advent Wreath is lighted

Celebrant: This candle represents our experience.

Deacon: For the times we have laughed together and cried together. The times we were angry at or overjoyed with each other. For the memories of the caring and joy but so also of the loss and sorrow we have shared.

A Reading from Paul's Letter to the Romans (8:26-28)

The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

Silence

Celebrant: Lord, give us awareness of ways, so often beyond our knowing, that with you nothing is lost but you use all our experiences to your glory and our good.

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

The Fourth Candle on the Advent Wreath is lighted

Celebrant: This candle represents our love.

Deacon: Love given and received. Love unacknowledged, unnoticed, and or unfelt. Love shared in times of joy and in times of sorrow.

A Reading from the First Letter of John. (4:7-12)

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

Silence

Celebrant: Lord, in your abundant forgiveness grant us patience with ourselves at our own failures and give us strength and courage to love yet again.

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

The Christ candle on the Advent Wreath is lighted

Celebrant: This candle represents God's light.

Deacon: Light that reveals that hurts, hatreds, tears and sorrows, even death itself, will not have the final word, for in the light of God we have even now glimpses of that place where there is no more death, sorrow, crying, or pain.

Silence

Celebrant: God of comfort and grace, you have wrapped us in your presence in this time of remembrance. As these candles have given light in darkness, help us find your light to guide us day-by-day and step-by-step as we try to live life more fully trusting in your promised presence with us just as we are. We cherish the special ways in which our loved ones have touched us and thank you for the gift their lives have been to us. Now, in your mercy, comfort us, encourage us, empower us.

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John (1:1-14)

People: Glory to you, Lord Christ.

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.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

People: Praise to you, Lord Christ.

Homily

Fr. Eberle

The Prayers of the People

Deacon: In the spirit of this season, let us now ask our God for what we need in this Christmas season.

Deacon: God, we come to you as Christmas dawns with pain growing inside us. As the nights have been growing longer, so has the darkness wrapped itself around

our hearts. In this season of our longest nights, we offer to you the parish in our hearts, the traumas that some of us cannot put into words.

Pause

Loving God, in your mercy.

People: Hear our prayer

Deacon: There are those among us who are grieving over what might have been. A death or loss has changed our experience of Christmas. Once it was a special day for each of us but someone has died or relationships have ended, jobs have been lost. We find ourselves adrift, alone, lost. Lord, help us find our way.

Pause

Loving God, in your mercy,

People: Hear our prayer

Deacon: The Christmas season reminds us of all that used to be and cannot be anymore. The memories of what was, the fears of what may be, overwhelm us. All around us we hear the sounds of celebration, but all we experience is a sense of feeling blue. Be present to us this night.

Pause

Loving God, in your mercy,

People: Hear our prayer.

Deacon: For the peace proclaimed by the Christmas Angels throughout the whole world.

Pause

Loving God, in your mercy,

People: Hear our prayer.

All are invited to offer their prayers silently for our region and the world:

Celebrant: O God of great compassion, hear the prayers of these your children. Grant to all, especially all who are bereaved and saddened this Christmas, the blessing of peace and love through Jesus Christ our Lord.

People: Amen.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

People: And also with you.

Offertory of Light and Hope

You are invited to come and light a candle in the votive stand. The light represents deeply personal griefs, sorrows, all those things which may make this season a "blue time" for you.

As you light your candle, you may, if you choose, gently speak, silently or aloud, the name, event, or emotion most on your heart that you offer now to Jesus who is the Light and Hope of the world.

The Holy Communion

The Great Thanksgiving - Eucharistic Prayer B

Celebrant: The Lord be with you

People: And also with you

Celebrant: Lift up your hearts

People: We lift them to the Lord.

Celebrant: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God

People: It is right to give him thanks and praise.

Celebrant: It is right, and a good and joyful thing always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

(The celebrant continues the prayer)

Therefore, we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who for ever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name:

***Celebrant and people:* Holy, holy, holy, Lord, God of power and might
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

*The people stand or kneel
(the celebrant continues)*

Celebrant: We give thanks to you, O God, for the goodness and love which you have made known to us in creation; in the calling of Israel to be your people; in your Word spoken through the prophets; and above all in the Word made flesh, Jesus, your Son. For in these last days you sent him to be incarnate from the Virgin Mary, to be the Savior and Redeemer of the world. In him, you have delivered us from evil, and made us worthy to stand before you. In him, you have brought us out of error into truth, out of sin into righteousness, out of death into life.

On the night before he died for us, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

After supper he took the cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, "Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me. Therefore, according to his command, O Father,

***Celebrant and people:*
We remember his death,
We proclaim his resurrection,
We await his coming in glory;**

(The Celebrant continues)

Celebrant: And we offer our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to you, O Lord of all; presenting to you, from your creation, this bread and this wine.

We pray you, gracious God, to send your Holy Spirit upon these gifts that they may be the Sacrament of the Body of Christ and his Blood of the new Covenant. Unite us to your Son in his sacrifice, that we may be acceptable through him, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit. In the fullness of time, put all things in subjection under your Christ, and bring us to that heavenly country where, with St. Philip and all your saints, we may enter the everlasting heritage of your sons and daughters; through Jesus Christ our Lord, the firstborn of all creation, the head of the Church, and the author of our salvation.

By him, and with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and for ever **AMEN.**

The Lord's Prayer

Celebrant and People:

**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 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,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

The Breaking of the Bread

Celebrant: Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us

People: **Therefore let us keep the feast.**

Celebrant: The Gifts of God for the People of God.

Post Communion Prayer

Celebrant and People:

Eternal God, heavenly Father, you have graciously accepted us as living members of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, and you have fed us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood. Send us now into the world in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Officiant offers a blessing.

Deacon: Go in peace, knowing that the God who so loved the world so loves you. God gives light in our darkness, light for healing and light for wholeness.

People: **The light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot put it out. Thanks be to God.**