The Longest Night

Saint Simons Presbyterian Church

December 21, 2025 | 7:00 pm

THE LONGEST NIGHT

Let us now prepare our hearts and minds to worship God.

The winter solstice is both the longest day and the longest night of the year.
In 2025, in the Northern Hemisphere, it takes place on December 21st.
Tomorrow, days will start becoming longer and nights shorter as spring approaches.

Many people struggle with deep sadness and loneliness at this time of year, when the world projects an "ideal" and energetic holiday season with blinking lights and smiles and parties and lots of presents. The church proclaims the JOY of Jesus' birth – and rightly so … but for those in deep grief, that joy can feel like a knife to the heart – a sense of God's betrayal or absence, because they cannot escape the pain in their souls.

To all who are hurting, we extend an invitation to name your burden, to hold it gently and to bless it … privately, and with others … including Jesus, who also knew suffering and even now suffers with us, even as he holds our pain in his strength … and hope.

GATHERING MUSIC — Rhonda Hambright

WELCOME — Rev. Laurie Bentley

OPENING PRAYER

ALL: Merciful God,
In this season of rejoicing, we come to you weary and grieving.
In this season of feasting, we hunger for healing and relief.
In this season of light, our hearts are veiled in sorrow
and shadow. Will this season ever end?
"Yes." We hear your "Yes."
Those who are weary will find rest.
Those who mourn will be comforted.
Those who hunger will be filled.
The Light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness will not overcome it.

LIGHTING OF THE CHRISTMAS CANDLE

ALL: We welcome you, O Christ, Light of the World.
In the midst of our suffering, help us to worship
you in spirit and in truth.

*Hymn 129 *Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming* ES IST EIN´ROS´

Lo, how a rose e'er blooming from tender stem hath sprung,
of Jesus's lineage coming, by faithful prophets sung.
It came, a floweret bright, amid the cold of winter,
when half spent was the night.

Isaiah 'twas foretold it, the rose I have in mind;
with Mary we behold it, the virgin mother kind.
To show God's love aright she bore for us a Savior,
when half spent was the night.

This flower, whose fragrance tender with sweetness fills the air,
dispels with glorious splendor the darkness everywhere.
En-fleshed, yet very God, from sin and death he saves us
and lightens every load.

Scripture Readings Isaiah 55:33, 9: 6-7
pg 1148 OT

Meditation Rev. Laurie Bentley

Candle Lighting

Light First Blue Candle

ONE: This candle represents our suffering and the suffering of the world.
In the light of God's love, we claim God's gift of truth.
There is no need to hide or deny. God welcomes us as we are.

ALL: Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me,
for I am poor and needy.
(Psalm 86:1)

Light Second Blue Candle

ONE: This candle represents our suffering and the suffering of the world.
In the light of God's love, we claim God's gift of lament.
We recognize our wounds and cry out to God.
We accept God's invitation to express every feeling and question.

ALL: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me,
from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest.
(Psalm 22:1-2)

Light Third Blue Candle

ONE: This candle represents our suffering and the suffering of the world.
In the light of God's love, we claim God's gift of courage.
Courage to be honest, to seek help, to comfort one another.
Courage to dare to love and dream again.

ALL: The Lord is my strength and my shield;
in him my heart trusts; so I am helped, and my heart exults,
and with my song I give thanks to him.
(Psalm 28:7)

Light Fourth Blue Candle

ONE: This candle represents our suffering and the suffering of the world.
In the light of God's love, we claim God's gift of hope.
God is good. God is strong. God is near, leading us to a day
without tears and pain, without sin and death.
Healing and deliverance are coming; if not now, then on that day.

ALL: By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance,
O God of our salvation; you are the hope of all the ends
of the earth and of the farthest seas.
(Psalm 65:5)

Prayer Time

ONE: God of compassion, we ask that you give our hearts voice, to name our deepest sadness and loss – and our spirits courage, to believe that you both hear us, and hold us safe, as we pray in the silence. …

Blessing

ONE: Jesus, you are full of compassion. You understand our pain.
Our suffering changes our experience of you and the celebration of your birth.
We are caught between remembering happier times and grieving what might have been.
In our loss we feel cut off – disconnected, adrift, alone.
Root us in your steadfast love.
Hold us, and all who weep this holy season throughout the world – those who mourn, those far from home, those looking for work, the lonely, the addicted, the abused, the estranged, the oppressed, the enslaved, the poor, victims of war, the sick and dying.
Shelter and sustain us all with your healing and hope, your peace and light.
We love you. We need you. We trust you.
We ask this in your name, Jesus, praying as you taught us:

ALL: 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. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

*Hymn 787 *God Weeps with Us Who Weep and Mourn* Mosher

sung to the tune of It Came Upon a Midnight Clear

God weeps with us who weep and mourn; God's tears flow down with ours,
and God's own heart is bruised and worn from all the heavy hours
of watching while the soul's bright fire burned lower day be day,
and pulse and breath and love's desire dimmed down to ash and clay.

Through tears and sorrow, God, we share a sense of your vast grief:
the weight of bearing every prayer for healing and relief,
the burden of our questions why, the doubts that they engage,
and as our friends and loved ones die, our hopelessness and rage.

And yet because, like us, you weep, we trust you will receive
and in your tender heart will keep the ones for whom we grieve,
while with your tears our hearts will taste the deep, dear core of things from
which both life and death are graced by loves's renewing springs.

Blessing

ONE: Let us bless this longest night. Blessed are we,

ALL: Gathered by candlelight in these dark times. In the confusion and pain that envelops us. We receive your comfort. It reaches to the core of our tired bodies, our worried minds, our heavy hearts. Your light has come to us in the songs sung, the words spoken, and in the faces all around, our companions along the way.

ONE: Blessed are we,

ALL: Who have poured out our hearts, and look for your light. bless us this Christmas, as we come softly to your cradle, just as we are.

Benediction

May the Lord bless us and keep us through the hard days of mourning ahead. May we see our Lord's face and feel his heart in kindnesses done and suffering shared. May we feel God's love embracing us, as surely as the infant Jesus felt his mother's arms protecting him. May our days be blessed with peace – and our nights with sleep – as God's gifts to us on all our Longest Nights. Amen.

Postlude

St. Simons Presbyterian Church

Ministers: All members of the church

Elders

Class of 2026
Sandi Goeldner
Kevin Lokey
Lee Malone
Bryan Neill
Bob Prater
Daryl Rabert
Carrie Wessel

Class of 2027
Taylor Brooks
Fred Griffith
Becky Livingston
Molly Macaulay
Bettye Russell
Mary Margaret Shiver
Doug Tingle

Class of 2028
Keith Griffin
Richard Hathaway
Buddy Hendrick
Denise Hidalgo
Ella Kent
Catherine McCrary
Matt Robinson

Deacons

Class of 2026
Anne Aspinwall
Judy Benjamin
Jackie Griffin
David Keen
Lowell Korb
Katie Rossiter
Linda Seierstad

Class of 2027
Pattie Boykin
Randy Ellis
Portia Hendrick
Drew Holland
Bunnie Lynn
Judy Scarlett
Kathy Wade

Class of 2028
Wheeler Bryan, Jr.
Peggy Dean
Sean Hidalgo
Tripper Mansfield
Elizabeth Shewell
Debbie States
Emelie Tingle

Staff

Rev. Rachel Rhodes
Senior Pastor
rachel@sspres.org

Rev. Dr. Jim Jackson
Interim Associate Pastor
jim@sspres.org

Rev. Laurie Bentley
Parish Associate
laurie@sspres.org

Rhonda Hambright
Music Director
rhonda@sspres.org

Amy Bishop
Organist
amy@sspres.org

Suzanne Morrison
Handbells
suzanne@sspres.org

Nat Scott
Congregational Life
nat@sspres.org

Frieda Warner
Children's Ministry/CE
frieda@sspres.org

Alyssa Lee
Youth Director
alyssa@sspres.org

Jeannine Torbert
Finance /Administration
jeannine@sspres.org

Ada Owens
Communications
ada@sspres.org

Donna Purdy
Administrative Assistant
donna@sspres.org

David Keen
Facility Manager
david@sspres.org

Madelynne Risi
Mission& Outreach
madelynne@sspres.org

Ashley Biletzskov
Preschool Director
ashley@sspres.org

Doug Marshall
Worship Tech Specialist

Becky Livingston
Clerk of Session

Tripper Mansfield
Portia Hendrick
Co -Chair of Deacons

Bob Harper
Treasurer

St. Simons Presbyterian Church is a member of the Savannah Presbytery and the Presbyterian Church (USA)

205 Kings Way | St. Simons Island, GA 31522 | 912-638-2220

www.sspres.org *facebook.com/saintsimonspresbyterian* *instagram.com/saintsimonspres*