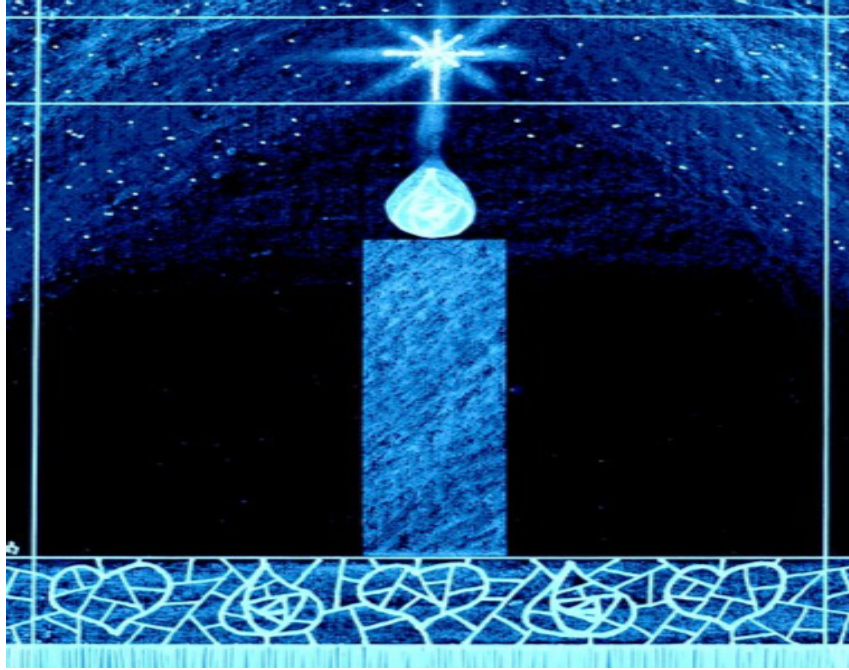


THE LONGEST NIGHT



What is the “Longest Night Service?” It’s a worship service that names and holds space for the grief and sadness that accompanies the Advent and Christmas holidays. It occurs on the “darkest day of the year” in solidarity with the darkness in our hearts.

Promoted by advertisers and our consumer society, we are confronted with the “ideal” Christmas: lights everywhere, with iced gingerbread houses, smiling children, and lots of presents. Plus the church pushes joy, joy, joy when many of us feel only sadness, solitude, and the silence of unmitigated grief.

So this service is an invitation for all who want to name their burden, and then set it down, privately and with others in communion with the suffering one, Jesus, who suffers with us while also bringing us strength and hope.

ST. SIMONS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

December 21, 2023 | 7:00 pm

Ushers

Jan Rossiter
Jeff Roberts
Anna Henry
Pat Heran
David Keen

THE LONGEST NIGHT

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

GATHERING MUSIC

Harpists: Rhonda Hambright, Lynda Kennedy,
and Melissa Tsai

You are encouraged to select a stone from the baskets provided and name your burden or grief.

*CALL TO WORSHIP:

One: Jesus said, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

ALL: Let us come to Jesus this night as he comes to us.

Matthew 11:28-30

*HYMN 129 *Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming*

RESPONSIVE PRAYERS

Gracious God, in the season of Advent, we give thanks that you come to be among us:

Emmanuel, God with us.

You came into the darkness of that time:

a time of change and stress, uncertainty and doubt.

You did not enter this world surrounded by grand things.

You were born in a stable, to parents far from home.

O God, we pray for your presence here and now, in the difficulties of our time.

We lay before you our offerings of honesty and need, of worry and hope.

For all who are grieving, we pray:

O Lord, you know what it means to lose someone you dearly love.

For all who are lonely, we pray:

O Lord, you know how it feels to look around you and feel there is no one left.

For all who are anxious, we pray:

O Lord, you know what it is like to be weary and heavy-laden.

For all who are vulnerable, we pray:

O Lord, you know what it means to be unhoused and unsafe.

For all who are beset by challenges, physical or emotional, we pray:

O Lord, you know how it feels to be in pain.

For all who long for light and hope, we pray:

O Lord, you know what it is like to wait in the darkness.

...Here we offer our personal petitions in silence.

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you that you came to be **full of grace and truth.**

In you we find our welcome.

You are our comfort and our company along the journey of our life.

In Jesus' name, we pray.

Amen.

SCRIPTURE: PSALM 88:1-7

REFLECTION

INVITATION TO THE TABLE

At this time, all are encouraged to silently reflect on your named burden or grief that you wish to acknowledge to the Lord. Then, please come forward to release your stone into the baptismal font. As you do, invite the light of Christ into your heart, trusting that Christ came into the world to be with us, wherever we are. After you have released your stone, you are invited to receive communion at the Lord's Table.

UNISON PRAYER

Gracious God, as we go from this place, we trust in your company along our way. Wrap your everlasting arms around us; swaddle us in the security of your love; comfort us with the silence of your quiet breath; brighten our path with the light of your presence. Then, send us into the world.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

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; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

*HYMN 144

In the Bleak Midwinter

CRANHAM

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

Silent Night, Holy Night
Harp Ensemble

Gruber

Please gather together for a time of fellowship in the Gathering Space following the service.

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

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