



Bethlehem Star 2, Virginia Wieringa

Service of the Longest Night

A Reminder of Hope in the Midst of Grief

6:00 p.m. + December 21, 2025 + Fourth Sunday of Advent

*Blessed are you who bear the light in unbearable times, who testify to its endurance amid the unendurable,
who bear witness to its persistence when everything seems in shadow and grief.*

*Blessed are you in whom the light lives, in whom the brightness blazes — your heart a chapel,
an altar where in the deepest night can be seen the fire that shines forth in you in unaccountable faith,
in stubborn hope, in love that illumines every broken thing it finds.*

Jan Richardson

Welcome and Centering (with sung response)

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

- ❖ Take a moment to be still and center yourself. You need not make anything happen. . . .
O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel. . .
- ❖ As best you can, release fear, anxiety, and stress. Let them drop away from you. . . .
That mourns in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appear.
- ❖ Consciously bring yourself *just as you are* to this moment of worship. God loves the real *you*.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

Remembering and Praying

We gather here on this long night, God,

daring to bring ourselves as we are.

We gather here with you, God, and with others,

in our need and bringing with us the pain of the hurting world.

We come to you, for you come to us in Jesus,

and you are Emmanuel, God with us.

We come with our sadness and our joy,

we come with our doubts and our faith,

We come with our tears and our laughter,

we come with our fears and our hopes.

We come as we are, because you invite us to come,

and you have promised never to turn us away.

Lighting the Way: Remembering Our Losses and Whispering the Names

The first candle we light is to remember those whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember their name, their face, their voice, the memory that binds them to us in this season.

(Pause while the first candle is lit. You are invited to whisper aloud the names of your loved ones.)

*O Loving God,
may Your Eternal Love surround them.*

For Those Who Make a Difficult Journey Tonight

"It Came Upon the Midnight Clear"

*It came upon the midnight clear, that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth to touch their harps of gold:
"Peace on the earth, good will to men, from heaven's all-gracious King."
The world in solemn stillness lay, to hear the angels sing.*

*And ye, beneath life's crushing load, whose forms are bending low,
who toil along the climbing way with painful steps and slow.
Look now! for glad and golden hours come swiftly on the wing.
O rest beside the weary road, and hear the angels sing!*

Entrusting Ourselves to God

contemplative adaptation of Psalm 39 (Nan Merrill)

*And now, O Loving Friend, for what do I wait?
My hope is in your guidance.
Forgive me all my mistakes.
I stand silent before you.
Surely, I am made new, redeemed by your Love!
Hear my prayer, O Listening Heart.
Give ear to my cry.
Wash away my tears with your peace!
Look upon me with mercy,
that I may know the joy
of living in the realm of Love,
now and in the Life to come.*

Silence for Reflection

Lighting the Way: Redeeming Our Pain

The second candle we light is to redeem the pain of loss, the loss of a relationship, a dream, or something that was very important to us, part of our lives, part of our own selves. We pause to gather up the pain of the past and offer it to God, asking that from God's hands we receive the gift of peace.

(Pause while the second candle is lit.)

*O Loving God,
refresh, restore, renew us,
and lead us into Your future.*

Sung Response

"In the Bleak Midwinter"

*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.*

Silence for Reflection

Lighting the Way: Remembering Our Community

The third candle we light is to remember that we are not alone this Christmas time. We acknowledge the disorientation, loneliness, and grief we've known these past weeks, months, and even years. And we also acknowledge the loving touch and acts of grace by family and friends. We give thanks for the support we have known. We are not alone.

(Pause while the third candle is lit.)

*O Loving God,
help us remember that dawn defeats darkness,
life overcomes death.*

Opening Ourselves to the Christ Who Comes

"O Little Town of Bethlehem"

*O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.*

*How silently, how silently, the wondrous Gift is giv'n;
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His Heav'n.
No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.*

*O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;
Oh, come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!*

Listening for the Good News from the Revelation

Revelation 21:1-7

Silence for Reflection

Lighting the Way: Remembering Our Hope

The fourth candle is lit to remember our faith and the gift of hope which the Christmas story offers to us. We remember that God, who shares our life, promises us a place and time of no more pain and suffering.

(Pause while the fourth candle is lit.)

*O Loving God,
help us remember You,
the One who shows the way,
Who brings the truth and Who bears the light.*

(The Christ candle will remain unlit as a sign of waiting for a future that is yet unknown to us, from which God beckons us.)

Song of Response

"Love Came Down at Christmas"

*Love came down at Christmas, love all lovely, love divine.
Love was born at Christmas; star and angels gave the sign.*

Consecration

Receiving Holy Communion and Lighting Candles

Benediction

Watch now, dear Lord, with those who wake or watch or weep tonight, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend your sick ones, O Lord Christ, rest your weary ones, bless your dying ones, soothe your suffering ones, have mercy on your afflicted ones, shield your joyous ones, give peace to your grieving ones, and all for your Love's sake. Amen.

And now may the God of hope fill us with all steadfastness and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



Assisting in Worship Today

Haley Brown – Associate Director of The Anchor House

Nick Cavazos – AV Production

Courtney Garrison – Ministry Assistant

Christian Ibanez – AV Production

Peter Johns – Associate Director of Contemplative Worship

Zachary Montasser – Violinist

Rev. Rachel Sciretti – Associate Pastor

Rev. Dr. Michael Sciretti, Jr. – Pastor of The Center

Rev. Dr. John Stephens – Senior Pastor

Rev. Andrew Wolfe – Pastor, Pastoral Care

Contemplative Communion and Candlelight Christmas Eve

Wednesday, December 24 | The Chapel | 4:00 p.m.

Join us for Contemplative Candlelight Christmas Eve worship service will take place in The Chapel. Through familiar carols and scripture readings we will retell the story of the first Christmas.

Upcoming Events

January 9-11, "Anchored in The Center" 25th Anniversary Weekend

- *Friday, Jan 9th 6:30 – 8:00pm Conversation and Q&A with Rev. Dr. Michael Sciretti, Jr. & Jerry Webber (via zoom)*
- *Saturday, Jan 10th 9:00am – 2:00pm Guided Silent Retreat with Rev. Dr. Michael Sciretti, Jr.: Contemplative Anchoring in God, to Church, for the World \$35*
- *Sun, Jan 11th 8:45 am Worship and 10:00am Worship Response: Celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the Contemplative Worship Service*

February 20-21 – Enneagram Workshops with Sandra Smith

For information about The Center for Christian Spirituality and upcoming events, visit:

www.TheCenterFCS.org