



Pilgrim Congregational Church
United Church of Christ
December 21, 2021
The Longest Night

Image: Courtesy of Jan I. Richardson.

Music streamed in tonight's service

Home Beyond the Stars - arr. Pam Turner
O Come, O Come Emmanuel - NCH#116*
In the Bleak Midwinter - NCH#128*
Still, Still, Still - arr. Pam Turner
Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming - NCH#127*
Meditation on 'Silent Night' arr. Larry Shackley

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Tonight's service will be recorded.

Welcome to Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC

A Welcoming, Open and Affirming Church

Mission Statement

A welcoming home to all spiritual seekers

Making a difference in our world,

By fusing our Christian faith with everyday life and

Serving God by serving others.

Statement of Welcome

We honor the Biblical call to love one another as God first loved us. We welcome into the full life and ministry of the church all people of any race, nationality, religious background, educational background, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, economic status, and physical, mental, and emotional abilities.

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Prelude

Home Beyond the Stars - Pam Turner

Dot Bowe

Greeting

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all.

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

Psalm 139:10-11

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; on those who live in a land of deep shadow, a light has shone. For the yoke that was weighing upon them, and the burden upon their shoulders, you have broken in pieces, O God, our Redeemer.

* Opening Hymn O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (verse 1) NCH#116 Black

**1 O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here,
until the Child of God appear.**

Refrain:

***Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to you, O Israel!***

ADVENT
116 O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Palteriolium Cantionum Catholicarum, 1711
Based on ancient antiphons from Advent Vesper
Transl. John Mason Neale, 1851, and others; alt
St. 2, 7, transl. Henry Stowe Coffin, 1916, alt

Unison

1 O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, and
2 O come, O Wis - dom from on high, and
3 O come, O come, O A - do - mi, who
4 O come, O shoot of Jes - se, free your
5 O come, O Key of Da - vid, come, and

ran - som cap - tive Is - ra - el That mourns in lone - ly
or - der all things far and high; To us the path of
came to all on Si - nai high; And from its peak a
own from Sa - tan's tyr - an - ny, From depths of hell your
o - pen wide your heaven - ly home; Make safe the path to

ex - ile here, un - til the Child of God ap - pear.
knowl - edge show, and help us in that way to go.
sin - gle law pro - claimed in maj - es - ty and awe.
peo - ple save, and give them vic - tory o'er the grave.
end - less day, to hell's de - struc - tion close the way.

Refrain

Re - joice! Re - joice! Em - man - u - el shall come to you, O Is - ra - el!

Opening Prayer

God of mercy, hear our prayer in this Advent season for ourselves and for all who live with grief, fear, anxiety, or painful memories. We gather out of darkness to pray together for your gifts of courage, patience, and peace. We ask these things in the name of your Christ, who shares our life in sorrow and joy, death and new birth, despair and promise. Amen.

Special Music

Dot Bowe

During this special music, we encourage you to pick up the stone you've brought to your worship space. Hold it, feel the weight of it, imagine the burdens you are carrying held within that rock. Continue to hold the rock through the service.

Lighting the Advent Candles

First Candle—Grief

One: This candle represents our grief. We own the pain of losing loved ones, of dreams that go unfulfilled, of hopes that evaporate in despair.

All: May God's love surround all who mourn and struggle with grief.

Musical Response

In the Bleak Midwinter (verse 1)

**In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan, earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow, in the bleak midwinter, long ago.**

Second Candle—Courage

One: This candle represents our courage. It symbolizes the courage to confront our sorrow, to comfort each other, to share our feelings honestly and openly with each other, and to dare to hope in the midst of pain.

All: Refresh, restore, renew us O God, and lead us into your future with great courage.

Musical Response

In the Bleak Midwinter (verse 2)

**Our God transcends all heaven, earth, and its domain; heaven and earth shall flee away when Christ comes to reign;
In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed the sovereign God almighty
Jesus Christ.**

Third Candle—Memories

One: This candle represents our memories. For the times we laughed together, cried together, were angry with each other or overjoyed with each other. We light this candle for the memories of caring and joy we shared together.

**All: Holy one, help us to remember the light-filled joyful memories,
as we struggle with the dark memories.**

Musical Response

In the Bleak Midwinter (verse 3)

**Angels and archangels may have gathered there, cherubim and seraphim
thronged the midnight air;**

But his mother only, in her maiden bliss, worshiped the beloved with a kiss.

Fourth Candle—Love

One: This candle represents our love. The love we have given, and the love we have received. The love that has gone unacknowledged and unfelt, and the love that has been shared in times of joy and sorrow.

**All: Guide us, O God, as we remember all that has been given and
received in you whom we know as Love.**

Musical Response

In the Bleak Midwinter (verse 4)

What can I offer, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.

If I were a Wiseman, I would do my part; but what can I offer—all my heart.

Prayers of the People

One: God of wisdom, we come to you this Christmas Season tired, in turmoil, and in pain. As the nights have grown longer, so has darkness grown and wrapped itself around our hearts. In this season of longest night, we ask your healing blessings upon all that we carry in our hearts -- sorrow we fear may never end, wounds we cannot even put into words. Lord, in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

One: God of healing, as CoVid19 continues to disrupt our world, we mourn for every person whose life has been lost to this pandemic. We pray for those whose work has placed them in danger; those whose learning has been disrupted; those who are isolated by this disease. As we continue through such uncertainty and loss, we pray for your strength and courage to continue onward.

All: Hear our prayer.

One: God of mercy and compassion, there are those among us who are grieving over what might have been. Death or loss or terrible hurt has changed our experience of Christmas. We remember that once it was a special day for us, too, but someone or something precious has gone away from us in this life. We have lost a beloved, a job, a goal, a cause, a dream. We find ourselves adrift and alone. We are weary from the journey, and we have found no room at the inn. We come to you seeking rest, and peace, and shelter from the storm.

You are invited to pray aloud or in silence for particular concerns.

One: Lord, in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

One: God of grace, in the spirit of the season, grant us all that we need to comfort us as we journey through this Christmas season. We ask that you shelter and sustain all those of us, both here and throughout the world, who wander or want or weep or are heavy laden, that we may be lifted up in courage and journey on in Thy peace. Lord, in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

One: God of love, in this Christmas Season we embrace and offer up to you all that used to be which is now lost to us, and cannot be again. With celebration all around us, memories of what was, and fears of what may be, weigh heavy on our hearts. Please hold us close in your embrace, be near to us this night, until the light returns and morning comes. Lord, in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

One: Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give thine angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for thy love's sake. Amen.

All: Hear our prayer.

Special Music

Still, Still, Still—Pam Turner

Dot Bowe

Prayer of Thanksgiving

All: We give you thanks, comforting God, for wrapping us in your healing presence in this time of remembrance. We praise you for your guiding light, each day, as we try to live life more fully and wholly. Now, by your sacred, healing power: comfort us, encourage us, empower us. Amen.

A Cascade of Hope

The Peace

One: Peace be with you.

All: And also with you.

One: Let us share the peace of Christ with one another.

Closing Hymn

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

NCH #127 Black

**1 Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming from tender stem has sprung!
Of Jesse's lineage coming as saints of old have sung.
It came a floweret bright, amid the cold of winter
when half spent was the night.**

**2 Isaiah had 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.**

Benediction

Rev. Reebee Girash

Postlude

Meditation on 'Silent Night' arr. Larry Shackley

Dot Bowe

Source Notes: Liturgy for Lighting the Advent Candles and Reflections adapted from Ministry Matters: Longest Night by Nancy C. Townley. Liturgy for the Prayers of the People based off an order of worship used at The Cathedral Church of Saint Andrew, Honolulu Hawaii.

An Advent Poem

Waiting

By Julia Esquivel

Life is painful
because of the ones who have died.

Joy is painful
because of the ones who are crying.

Love is painful
because of the ones who hate.
And while I am loving, laughing, and crying,
I am waiting for you, my Lord!