MUSICAL MEDITATION AND CANDLE LIGHTING

As the music plays, you are invited to write on the you were given the name of a loved one, or a loss, a concern, or a prayer that you're praying tonight. You may come and hang the star on the Christmas tree and light a candle, if you wish. The altar is open if you would like to kneel for prayer.

*HYMN UMH #221 In the Bleak Midwinter

CONCLUDING PRAYERS

Another day will come, O God. I know not what it may bring forth, but make me ready, God for whatever it may be.
If I am to stand up, help me to stand bravely.
If I am to sit still, help me to sit quietly.
If I am to lie low, help me to do it patiently.
And if I am to do nothing, help me do it gallantly.
Make these words more than words, and give me the Spirit of thy peace. Amen.

O God, support us all the day long in this troubled life, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then, Lord, in thy mercy, grant us safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last. Amen.

The Blessing & Sending Forth

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you;
The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace, both now and forever more. Amen.

Postlude

Christmas Eve Services – December 24, 2024

5:00 pm Beacon Christmas Eve Service, Bldg 3, Assembly Hall
7:00 pm Traditional Christmas Eve Service, Bldg. 2, Sanctuary

Swansboro
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

"Worship God, Love One Another, Serve the World"

December 21, 2024
6:00 pm

On this night, the Winter Solstice, we pause to remember loved ones who have died, hardships we have suffered, and brokenness we have endured throughout the year. We acknowledge the grief caused by loss in our lives and world during this season of joy. The Longest Night Service is a time when we share our grief and sense of loss with God and with each other. We come together as a community of faith to give and receive comfort, to pray, and hear the promises of God in scripture. We come to light candles to help drive away our inner cold and darkness. We come to be healed as we receive words of hope and reassurance. The good thing about the longest night is that with its passing, light shines forth more and more.

Longest Night Service

GATHERING MUSIC

WELCOME

CALL TO WORSHIP

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
The Word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth, and we have seen his glory.
In him was life, and that life was the light of all.
The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness shall not overcome it.

*SONG

OPENING PRAYER

OT LESSON Lamentations 3:1-3, 19-26

PSALM 22

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me, so far from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry by day but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.
In you, our ancestors trusted. They trusted and you delivered them.
It was you who brought me from the womb,
you who kept me safe on my mother's breast.
Since my mother bore me, you have been my God.
Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.
God does not despise the affliction of the afflicted.
God does not hide from me.
When I cry to God, God hears me.
Thanks be to God.

SCRIPTURE Matthew 5:3-11

SPECIAL MUSIC Angie Cooper

RESPONSE: CANDLE LIGHTING AND LITANY OF REMEMBRANCE

We light this candle to remember those who are captive to darkness.
(The first candle is lit.)
For those lost in the night of addiction, depression, anxiety, or unexpected grief, we pray to God, who guided the Israelites through the darkness with a pillar of fire:
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night.

We light this candle to remember those who have died, and those who mourn the dead.
(The second candle is lit.)
The shadow of death can seem impenetrably dark during these long nights. We pray to God, whose first act in creation was to call light from darkness:
Death's dark shadow put to flight.

We light this candle to remember those who are alone.
(The third candle is lit.)
We remember those who are isolated from loved ones, far from home, wandering down the wrong path or convinced that God is unconcerned with their suffering. We pray to God, who is like the woman who lit a lantern to search all night for one lost coin:
Refresh the hearts that long for you.

We light this candle to remember those who are battling illness.
(The fourth candle is lit.)
We lift up those who suffer the pain, indignity, and bewilderment that accompany a broken body. For all who desire to be returned to wholeness, we pray to God, who lit the night sky with a star to guide magi to the healing Christ:
Restore the broken: make us new.

We light this candle to remember those who feel that hardship will overwhelm them.
(The fifth candle is lit.)
For the poor, the persecuted, the hungry, and the homeless, we pray to God, who walked with three men through the consuming flames of a fiery furnace:
In strength and beauty come and stay.

We light this candle to remember those affected by war.
(The sixth candle is lit.)
For soldiers; for civilians in war-torn nations; for families who mourn the loss of loved ones to violent conflict. We pray to God, with eyes of blazing fire, who promises a vision of peace:
Teach us your will and guide our way.

We light this candle to remember ourselves this Christmas time.
(*The seventh candle is lit).*
We pause and remember the past weeks, months, and for some of us years, that have been heavy with burdens. We accept and lay before you, God, the sharpness of memory, the sadness and grief, the hurt and pain. We accept and lay before you the ways we feel we have fallen short, and the times we have spent blaming ourselves, and you, for all that we have suffered. We accept and lay before you the time we have walked alone, in darkness; and in knowledge of our own mortality.

We remember that though we have journeyed far, and that, while lost, we may have turned away from the light, the light itself has not failed. We remember that though winter be upon us and though the night be dark, with the turning of the Wheel the dawn will come, and dawn defeats the darkness.

O come thou day-spring, come and cheer our spirits by thy advent here. Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put to flight. Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.