

WESTMINSTER  PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH

A Service of Hope and Healing

**December 8, 2024
7:00 p.m.**

For those preparing for this service at home, we invite you to create a worship center for yourself, to include a candle and means to light it later in the service. You may want to include an open Bible, and photos or symbols of who or what you are carrying upon your heart this Advent Season.

For those attending this service in-person, we invite you to place photos or symbols next to the candles in the windows or have them with you in the pews as we share the burdens on our hearts with God.

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*May God help each of us to participate in this service
and throughout the season as we are able.*

*The service begins in silence, so we invite you to take some time to
“Be still, and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10)*

PRELUDE Of the Father’s Love Begotten DIVINUM MYSTERIUM
Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming ES IST EIN ROS’

HYMN O Come, O Come, Emmanuel VENI EMMANUEL

**O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

**O come, thou Wisdom from on high,
who orderest all things mightily;
to us the path of knowledge show,
and teach us in her ways to go.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

THE GATHERING OF THE COMMUNITY

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
And also with you.

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.

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

**God of mercy,
hear our prayers in this Advent season
for ourselves, and for our families and friends
who live with painful thoughts and memories.
Hear our prayers for our country and our world
as we lift up so much suffering to you.
We claim your light which shines always in the darkness.
We ask for strength for today,
courage for tomorrow,
and peace for the past.
We ask these things in the name of Christ,
who shares our life in joy and sorrow,
death and new birth, promise and hope. Amen.**

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Isaiah 40:1, 25-31

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.
To whom then will you compare me,
or who is my equal? says the Holy One.
Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these?
He who brings out their host and numbers them,
calling them all by name;
because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing.
Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel,
“My way is hidden from the Lord,
and my right is disregarded by my God”?
Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.

He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.
Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;
but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Psalm 121

I will lift up my eyes to the hills, from where is my help to come?
My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot be moved,
and he who watches over you will not fall asleep.
Behold, he who keeps watch over Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord himself watches over you; the Lord is your shade at your right hand,
so that the sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.
The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; it is he who shall keep you safe.
The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in from this time forth forevermore.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Matthew 11:28-30

“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.”

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

HYMN

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

VENI EMMANUEL

**O come, thou Rod of Jesse, free
thine own from Satan's tyranny;
from depths of hell thy people save,
and give them victory over the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

A LITURGY OF REMEMBRANCE

Lighting of Four Advent Candles

FIRST CANDLE

The first candle we light is to redeem the pain of loss – the loss of relationships; the loss of jobs with the security they bring; the loss of health in ourselves or in family members; the loss of joy and peace in our lives from the stresses which surround us; the loss of the “normal” we knew before the pandemic and other major changes in our lives; the loss and loneliness we experience when we cannot be with our loved ones. As we gather up this pain, we offer it to you, O God, asking that into our open hands you will place the gift of peace. I invite you to name the pain of loss in the silence of your heart.

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

**God of mystery,
we turn our hearts to you.
We come before you in need of peace,
grateful for the mystery of life
and ever keenly aware of your promises
of guidance and protection.
We want to place our trust in you,
but our hearts grow fearful and anxious.
We forget so easily that you will be with us
in all that we experience.
Teach us to be patient
with the transformation of our lives
and to be open to the changes,
which we are now going through. Amen.**

HYMN

Come, O Come, Emmanuel

VENI EMMANUEL

**O come, thou Key of David, come,
and open wide our heavenly home;
make safe the way that leads on high,
and close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

SECOND CANDLE

The second candle we light for those who experience a loss of direction in their lives. God of the Exodus, you led Moses and your people through the wilderness to a new land. Hear our prayer. We want so much to have a sense of direction, to know where we are, and where we ought to be headed. But the darkness and the questions stay. You ask us to be full of faith, to believe deep

within that you are our signpost, that you are our wisdom and our guide, and to trust in your presence. Your words to us are clear, "Do not fear; I go before you."

Let us remember that dawn defeats the darkness.

HYMN O Come, O Come, Emmanuel VENI EMMANUEL

**O come, O come, great Lord of might,
who to thy tribes on Sinai's height
in ancient times once gave the law
in cloud and majesty and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

THIRD CANDLE

The third candle we light is to remember those persons whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember their names, their voices, their faces, the memory that binds them to us in this season. We hold them before God, giving thanks for their lives in ours. Please take a moment to remember those who have died. I invite you to name them aloud or in the silence of your hearts...

Let us remember: **God's eternal love surrounds them.**

HYMN O Come, O Come, Emmanuel VENI EMMANUEL

**O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer
our spirits by thine 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.**

FOURTH CANDLE

The fourth candle we light as a sign of hope, the hope that 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, no more tears, where our cups run over with God's grace and love, and all is at peace. With hope in the fulfillment of God's reign, we live our present lives in confidence and faith.

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

**O God, whose spirit is known
by those whose hearts are thankful,
and who makes gratitude and hope
a companion of strength,**

lift up our hearts, we pray,
to a joyous confidence in your care.
Guide us when we cannot see the way.
Where there is love in life,
teach us to find it;
help us to trust it
and enable us to grow
in the power of love,
so may our lives bring comfort
and encouragement to others.
We ask it, in the name of Jesus Christ,
whose life is our light. Amen.

HYMN

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

VENI EMMANUEL

O come, thou Root of Jesse's tree,
free thine own from Satan's tyranny;
from depths of hell thy people save
and give them vict'ry o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

In the spirit of this season let us now confidently ask our God for all the good things we need for ourselves as we participate in this Christmas as special people coping with our many different losses. God, hear our prayer.

And in your mercy, answer.

For our families and friends, that they may continue to help and support us. God, hear our prayer.

And in your mercy, answer.

For any person we have loved who has died, for all the losses we know in our lives, that all may be redeemed by your Easter promise. God, hear our prayer.

And in your mercy, answer.

For our families and friends, that you may bless them with love, peace, and joy. God, hear our prayer.

And in your mercy, answer.

For peace throughout the world as proclaimed by the Christmas angels on that faraway hillside. God, hear our prayer.

And in your mercy, answer.

For greater understanding of the lessons of love and acceptance as taught by Jesus your Christ. God, hear our prayer.

And in your mercy, answer.

God of great compassion and love, listen to the prayers of these your people. Grant to all, especially the bereaved and troubled ones this Christmas, the blessing we ask in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven ...

LIGHTING OF INDIVIDUAL CANDLES

Each of us comes bearing our own hurts, sorrow, and broken places. As you light your candle, remember that it is God who lights a candle in our darkness and holds us close until we are able to shine.

Meditative Music

In the Bleak Midwinter

CRANHAM

CLOSING

As we share in this Service of Hope and Healing, we embrace and claim the darkness that is present both in the world and in our own lives. As people who are familiar with the darkness, we also know that we will be illumined by the Light of the Christ Child this Christmas. May the Christ Child, born in a lowly stable, vulnerable yet the fullness of God's love, bring light, comfort, peace and joy this holiday season.

HYMN

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

VENI EMMANUEL

**O come, Desire of nations, bind
all peoples in one heart and mind;
bid envy, strife and discord cease;
fill the whole world with heaven's peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

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

Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

May the hope of the Christ Child sustain us through this darkness
that together we may shine again. Amen.

Go in peace.

SERVICE NOTES

LITURGISTS: Rev. Dr. Donovan A. Drake, Rev. Dr. Guy D. Griffith, Rev. Heidi Hudnut-Beumler, and Rev. Stephanie H. Boaz.

MUSICIAN: Dr. John Semingson, Director of Music Ministries, and pianist.

NOTE: The hymn "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" is a song of people in darkness, longing for God's light. It is not calling us to rejoice in the worldly form of the word, but calling our spirits and souls to reflect the true hope and joy only God can give. This hymn is a paraphrase of the ancient "O Antiphons" from the eighth century. Historically, these responses accompanied the "Song of Mary" canticle at Evening Prayer from December 17-23. They are a magnificent theology that uses ancient biblical imagery drawn from the messianic hopes of the Old Testament to proclaim the coming Christ as the fulfillment not only of Old Testament hopes, but present ones as well. Their repeated use of the imperative "Come!" embodies the longing of us all for the Divine Messiah.

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