



SAINT JOHN'S

EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Rooted in God, Growing in Faith

The Longest Night Liturgy *A Service of Comfort and Peace*

December 21, 2024 at 4:00 p.m.

576 Concord Rd. Glen Mills, PA 19342
Phone: 610-459-2994 SaintJohnsConcord.com

Founded 1702 - Celebrating 324 Years of Worship

The Rev. Jill M. LaRoche Wikel – Rector
The Rev. Terry Dinovo – Priest Associate

Mission of Saint John's:

To be a welcoming community committed to seeking, serving, and growing in Christ.

*Episcopalians believe in a loving, liberating and life-giving God.
St. John's welcomes all to our diverse, inclusive and affirming community.*

Welcome to Saint John's, Concord (Glen Mills) – Welcome to all who are visiting Saint John's today. We hope you enjoy worshipping with us and that you are blessed by God. You are invited to fill out one of the visitors' cards in the pew or use the QR code so that we can help you get to know Saint John's.



A Service for Those Who Find This Season Difficult

Welcome to our Longest Night Liturgy, sometimes called a "Blue Christmas" service. For some people, memories of past experiences and the pain of present situations can become overwhelming during a season when much of society professes joy and wonder. Christmas and New Year's Eve can be a difficult reminder of the challenges in our lives. In this service, we invite you to listen, to pray, and to sing. We invite you to meditate upon the pain and sorrow you may bring—and we invite you to offer this pain to God. May you will find hope and comfort in knowing that you are not alone, and though there are times we walk through darkness, the promise of the Christ child is that Love and Light, and not darkness, will be known throughout the world.

— GATHERING —

We prepare our hearts for worship in quiet prayer, prelude and song. Kindly refrain from talking for this time.

Prelude

In the Bleak Midwinter

Processional Hymn

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Hymnal 56 vv 1,4,7

1 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!*

4 O come, thou Branch of Jesse's tree,
free them from Satan's tyranny
that trust thy mighty power to save,
and give them victory o'er the grave.

Refrain

7 O come, Desire of nations, bind
in one the hearts of all mankind;
bid thou our sad divisions cease,
and be thyself our King of Peace.

Refrain

The Celebrant greets the People.

Words of Invitation

Celebrant: If I say, "Surely the darkness will cover me, and the light around me turn to night," darkness is not dark to you, O God; the night is as bright as the day; darkness and light to you are both alike.

Celebrant: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

People: Jesus was in the beginning with God.

Celebrant: What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

People: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

Opening Collect Prayer

Celebrant: God be with you.

People: And also with you.

Celebrant: Let us pray. O God, Holy Comforter, you are the source and redeemer of life. Only you fully know and understand the places that we find ourselves: between faith and doubt, light and

darkness, hope and despair, joy and fatigue of spirit, peace and unrest. Help us to see beyond the darkness into your glorious light, to move in heart and mind beyond our grief and fear into your ever-present care; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Candle lighting

The four white candles are lit while the leader says:

Leader: On this longest night, we gather to remember that in the beginning, all was formless void and darkness; into that darkness our Creator spoke, “Light” and recognized its goodness. Tonight,

we light a candle for those we want to remember –
we light a candle for whatever we need to let go of –
we light a candle as a prayer beyond words –
and we light a candle for hope.

Leader: Let us pray. O Gracious God, as you have called forth light from the void, and made the sun to know its going down and its rising: Dispel the darkness of our hearts, that by your brightness we may know you to be the true God and eternal light, living and reigning for ever and ever. **Amen.**

You are invited, during the following musical meditation or at any time during the service, to come forward to light a candle. This is the longest night – take all the time you need.

Meditation Song

O Lord Hear my Prayer

WLP 827

The musical score is written for voice and piano in G major and 4/4 time. It consists of three systems of music. The first system has two staves: a vocal line and a piano accompaniment line. The lyrics are: "O Lord hear my pray'r, O Lord hear my pray'r." The second system also has two staves. The lyrics are: "When I call, an - swer me. O Lord hear my pray'r. O". The third system has two staves. The lyrics are: "Lord hear my pray'r, Come and lis - ten to me. O". The piece ends with a double bar line and the word "Fine" above the final note.

This song comes from Taizé Community and is sung repeatedly for several minutes; it's meant to serve as a kind of musical centering prayer.

Once everyone has had a chance to come forward and light a candle, the following prayer is said:

Leader: 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.**

— WORD OF GOD —

The First Reading of Comfort and Hope

Isaiah 40:1-5,28-29

Lector: A reading of Comfort and Hope from the Prophet Isaiah.

Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of God dawned upon you.
For darkness covers the earth
and thick gloom enshrouds the peoples,
but over you the Lord will rise,
and his glory will appear over you.
Nations shall stream to your light
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

Your gates will always be open;
by day or night they will never be shut.
Violence will no more be heard in your land,
ruin or destruction within your borders.
The sun shall no longer be your light by day,
nor for brightness shall the moon give
light to you by night,
but the Lord will be your everlasting light,
and your God will be your glory.

Lector: Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people.

***People:* Thanks be to God.**

The Second Reading of Comfort and Hope

by Madeleine L'Engle

Lector: 'Into the darkest hour' – A poem by Madeleine L'Engle.

It was a time like this,
War & tumult of war,
a horror in the air.
Hungry yawned the abyss—
and yet there came the star
and the child most wonderfully there.

It was a time like this
of fear & lust for power,
license & greed and blight—
and yet the Prince of bliss
came into the darkest hour
in quiet & silent light.

And in a time like this
how celebrate his birth
when all things fall apart?
Ah! wonderful it is
with no room on the earth
the stable is our heart.

L'Engle, Madeleine. Miracle on 10th Street: And Other Christmas Writings (p. 48).

Gospel Hymn

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silent

Hymnal 324

1 Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
and with fear and trembling stand;

ponder nothing earthly-minded,
for with blessing in his hand
Christ our God to earth descendeth,
our full homage to demand.

- 2 King of kings, yet born of Mary,
as of old on earth he stood,
Lord of lords in human vesture,
in the Body and the Blood
he will give to all the faithful
his own self for heavenly food.
- 3 Rank on rank the host of heaven
spreads its vanguard on the way,
as the Light of Light descendeth
from the realms of endless day,
that the powers of hell may vanish
as the darkness clears away.
- 4 At his feet the six-winged seraph;
cherubim with sleepless eye
veil their faces to the Presence,
as with ceaseless voice they cry,
“Alleluia, alleluia!
Alleluia, Lord Most High!”

The Gospel

Matthew 11:27-30

Celebrant: The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew.

***People:* Glory to you, Lord Christ.**

Celebrant: Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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.”

Celebrant: The Gospel of the Lord.

***People:* Praise to you, Lord Christ.**

Homily

Ms. Margie Hatcher

Prayers of the People *All Stand*

Celebrant: God of wisdom, we come to you this December evening 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: the sorrow we dread may never end, fears we cannot even put into words, wounds we’re afraid will never heal. God, hear our prayer.

People: Draw close, Lord Jesus Christ, and shine your light on all that is filled with darkness.

Celebrant: God of comfort and compassion, in a season when others don't have enough hours in a day to get their lists checked off, their cards mailed, their presents wrapped, we have all the time in the world: to remember the loss that has stolen the joy of the season; to grieve over a job, a dream, a loved one; to sit in the shadows of our homes, too weary to move. God, hear our prayer.

People: Draw close, Lord Jesus Christ, and shine your light on all that is filled with darkness.

Celebrant: 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 who wander or want or weep or are heavy laden, that we may be lifted up in courage and journey on in your peace. God, hear our prayer.

People: Draw close, Lord Jesus Christ, and shine your light on all that is filled with darkness.

Celebrant: 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. God, hear our prayer,

People: Draw close, Lord Jesus Christ, and shine your light on all that is filled with darkness.

Celebrant: O God, the source of eternal light: Shed forth your unending day upon us who watch for you, that our lips may praise you, our lives may bless you, and our worship on the morrow give you glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. ***Amen.***

The PEACE *Ministers and the People may greet one another with waves and peace signs.*

Offertory Hymn

A Candle is Burning

Words by Sandra Dean



1. A can - dle is__ burn - ing, a__ flame warm and bright; a__
 2. A can - dle is__ burn - ing, a__ can - dle of Peace; a__
 3. A can - dle is__ burn - ing, a__ can - dle of Joy; a__
 4. A can - dle is__ burn - ing, a__ can - dle of Love; a__



can - dle of Hope in De - cem - ber's dark night. While
 can - dle to sig - nal that__ con - flict must cease. For
 can - dle to wel - come brave Ma - ry's new boy. Our
 can - dle to point us to__ heav - en a - bove. A



an - gels sing bless - ings from heav'n's star - ry sky our
 Je - sus is__ com - ing to__ show us the way; a__
 hearts fill with won - der and__ eyes light and glow as__
 ba - by for__ Christ - mas, a__ won - der - ful birth; for__



hearts we pre - pare now, for__ Je - sus is nigh.
 mes - sage of Peace hum - bly__ laid in the hay.
 Joy bright - ens win - ter like__ sun - shine on snow.
 Je - sus is bring - ing God's Love to our earth.



—**HOLY COMMUNION**—

The Great Thanksgiving

Eucharistic Prayer A

BCP, p. 361

Please stand in body or spirit for the Eucharistic Prayer

Celebrant: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Celebrant: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them to the Lord.

Celebrant: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. *People:* It is right to give God thanks and praise.

Then the Celebrant continues

It is right...

BCP, p. 361

Communion Sanctus

See Music Pew Card

Hymnal S-129

Celebrant: As our Savior Christ has taught us, we now pray,

People and Celebrant

**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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
 For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.**

The Breaking of the Bread - *The Celebrant breaks the consecrated Bread*

Celebrant: Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us;

People: Therefore let us keep the feast.

*All are welcome to receive Holy Communion at God's Table wherever you are on your journey to know God more fully.
 We have two Chalices: for dipping your wafer, please remain at the altar rail; to sip wine, please visit the Chalice at the organ.
 We have gluten-free wafers for those that need them; please let the Priest know.*

Communion Anthem

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

Traditional German Hymn

Post Communion Prayer

Please stand in body or spirit

BCP p. 365

— **SENDING** —

Nighttime Prayer

From the *New Zealand Book of Common Prayer*, p. 184

Lord, it is night.

The night is for stillness.

Let us be still in the presence of God.

It is night after a long day.

What has been done has been done; what has not been done has not been done;
let it be.

The night is dark.

Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of our own lives rest in you.

The night is quiet.

Let the quietness of your peace enfold us, all dear to us, and all who have no peace.

The night heralds the dawn.

Let us look expectantly to a new day, new joys, new possibilities.

In your name we pray. **Amen.**

Blessing

Celebrant: Be strong and be bold, for it is God who goes before you. God will be with you; God will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed. And may the blessing of God, the One, Holy, Undivided Trinity, be upon you and abide with you now and always. **Amen.**

Recessional Hymn

Of the Father's Love Begotten

Hymnal 82

- 1 Of the Father's love begotten,
ere the worlds began to be,
he is Alpha and Omega,
he the source, the ending he,
of the things that are, that have been,
and that future years shall see,
evermore and evermore!
- 2 O that birth for ever blessèd,
when the Virgin, full of grace,
by the Holy Ghost conceiving,
bore the Savior of our race;
and the Babe, the world's Redeemer,
first revealed his sacred face,
evermore and evermore!

- 3 Let the heights of heaven adore him;
 angel hosts, his praises sing;
 powers, dominions, bow before him,
 and extol our God and King;
 let no tongue on earth be silent,
 every voice in concert ring,
 evermore and evermore!
- 4 Christ, to thee with God the Father,
 and, O Holy Ghost, to thee,
 hymn and chant and high thanksgiving,
 and unwearied praises be;
 honor, glory and dominion,
 and eternal victory,
 evermore and evermore!

Dismissal - *The worship service has ended; our service to God and to our neighbors begins.*

Postlude

Still, Still, Still

All scripture and prayers in bulletin are printed with permission.

View FULL bulletin online at SaintJohnsConcord.com/DigitalBulletins

Service Participants:

Celebrant: The Rev Jill LaRoche Wikel
Organist: Laura Seidlemann
Prayer Leader and Preacher: Margie Hatcher
Lector: Rev Terry Dinovo
Lay Eucharistic Minister: John Pachkowski
Tech Team: Gerry Tierney and Patti Doyle

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Christmas Season Schedule

Tuesday, December 24 – Christmas Eve

- 3:00 PM - Cocoa, Carols, and Creche - A thirty-minute, family Communion service with cocoa and cookies in the Parish Hall following the service!
- 5:00 PM - Christmas Eve Candlelight Service with Choir Music
- 7:30 PM - Christmas Eve Candlelight Service with Choir Music (*live-streamed*)



Wednesday, December 25 - Christmas Day @ 10 AM – Contemplative Worship (*live-streamed*)

Sunday, December 29 @ 10 AM – ONE Service of Christmas Lessons & Carols (*live-streamed*)

January Events – Please join us!

Saturday, January 11 @ 2 PM – Burning of the Greens
 Saturday, January 12 & Saturday, January 26 @ 4 PM – Youth Group
 Thursday, January 9 & 23 @ 10 AM – Thursday Morning Café; Healing Eucharist @ 11:30 AM
 Saturday, January 11 @ 8:30 AM – Men’s Breakfast
 Tuesday, January 21 @ 6:30 PM – What Would Jesus Brew?
 Saturday, January 25 @ 4 PM – Movie Night

Limited Office Hours Between Christmas & New Year’s

The Parish Office will have limited office hours the week of Christmas and New Year’s. The office will be closed December 25 & 26 and Monday, January 1. If you plan to stop by on another day those weeks, please call ahead to be sure the office is open.

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| <p><u>Church Staff</u> Rev. Jill LaRoche Wikel - <i>Rector</i> Rev. Terry Dinovo – <i>Priest Associate</i> Jen Troutman – <i>Parish Administrator</i> Margaret Hatcher – <i>Christian Education Director</i> Kevin Werner and Ron Arrants – <i>Sextons</i> Miriam Stanton & Maureen Thompson – <i>Office Volunteers</i></p> | <p><u>Vestry Members, Wardens and Officers</u> Danielle Yoch (<i>Rector’s Warden</i>) Bill Calhoun (<i>Vestry Warden</i>) Burt Blackburn (<i>Treasurer</i>) Jacqui Dunn, Mary Pat Lynam, John Pachkowski, Tracey Payne, Carla Durdan, Dick Constable, Ron Hammer, Ann McGonigal & Gerry Tierney</p> |
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| <p><u>Rev. Jill:</u> RevJill@SaintJohnsConcord.com</p> | |
| <p><u>Rev. Terry:</u> RevTerry@SaintJohnsConcord.com</p> | |
| <p><u>Church Office Hours:</u> Monday – Friday: 9 AM – 1 PM</p> | |