



Longest Night Service

**A Candlelight Service of
Healing and Hope
St. John's Episcopal Church
Dryden, Michigan**

Welcome - Call to Worship

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

People: **The word became flesh and
lived among us, full of grace
and truth.**

Leader: In him was life, and that life was
the light of all.

People: **The light shines in the
darkness, and the darkness
has never been able to
extinguish it.**

Opening Prayer (*Responsive*)

Leader: We look for light but find
darkness, for brightness, but walk
in gloom.

We grope like those who have no
eyes; we stumble at noon as in
the twilight.

All: **You are the light of the world;
be light in our darkness, O
Christ.**

Leader: If I say, "Let only darkness cover
me, and the light about me be
night," even the darkness is not
dark to you, the night is bright as
day, for darkness is as light with
you.

All: You are the light of the world;
be light in our darkness, O
Christ.

Leader: Blessed be your name, O God,
forever. You reveal deep and
mysterious things; You are the
light and in you is no darkness.
Our darkness is passing away,
Already the true light is shining.

All: You are the light of the world;
be light in our darkness, O
Christ.
Amen.

Hymn 56: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" v. 2 –
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Stories of Light – Words of God's Promises

Genesis 1:1-5 "The Light of Creation"

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day" and the

darkness he called “night”. And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day.

Comment: A black void without shape or form, suddenly pierced by a brilliant light. That’s how some imagine this sequence. Only the Creator’s eyes could behold it. Certainly our eyes would have been permanently blinded by such an explosion of light. But might it have happened differently? Think of how spring emerges. How a baby is formed from just two cells. God seems to like to work slowly, carefully over time. Maybe that first light started in one cell and then expanded. We see something like that every day. He created dawn to allow our fragile eyes to adjust from darkness to light. Anyone who has sat vigil with a loved one knows how dark 3AM can be. But then gradually grey shapes emerge, then muted colors and then finally the dawn of a new day. When our hearts are surrounded by darkness through sorrow or loss, we are fragile and would recoil from too much, too soon. Our Savior knows we need time. So He stands at our side, helping us heal and slowly, lovingly, adding just the right amount of light to our life. It may be so gradual that we barely sense it, but we can trust that He will bring us out of the darkness to the light of His love.

(Light candle)

Jesus said “I am the light of the world”

All: Anyone who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

Hymn 25: O Gracious Light



Exodus 13:17-22 “The light of Exodus”

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, “If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.” So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt armed for battle. Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear an oath. He had said “God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place.” After leaving Succoth they camped at Etham on the edge of the desert. By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could

travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

Comment: From time to time during our lives we find ourselves wandering in the wilderness. It may be a wilderness of our own making. It may be a wilderness caused by forces beyond our control. When the Hebrew people escaped from the bondage of the Pharaohs of Egypt, God led them into the wilderness. He knew they needed time to know themselves in a new way. They were no longer slaves – they were a new people, a beloved people. They needed time to get to know and trust Him as well. They didn't know what lay before them. They didn't know how their faith would be tested in that time of wandering. They didn't know that these years would shape and form them into a strong nation – God's chosen people. It was not easy. They sometimes doubted they were doing the right thing. So he gave them signs to reassure them and to help guide their journey.

As we live and move through our wilderness experiences these same things happen to us. God asks us to trust, to know that He is with us, guiding our steps. Our "pillars of cloud and fire" may be different – signs perfectly suited to lift our hearts and lend strength to our journey. The sweet call of the cardinal in winter's snow. Or perhaps the welcoming smile of a friend

who always seems to know how to bring peace to our hearts. God's presence is in those signs, the light of the fire leading us on through the darkness of our lives.

As we light the candle of Exodus may we see before us the comforting assurance of God's love as it leads us through our journeys in the wilderness.

(Light candle)

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world"

All: Anyone who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

H 393: *Praise Our Great and Gracious Lord*

Isaiah 60:1-3 "The Light of the Prophets"

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

Comment: At certain times in the midst of the preparation, joy and celebration of Christmas, we find it hard to participate. The loss, the hurt, the pain that can be very real to

us in this season overwhelms us. We hear the words of God's love; we may even be aware of God's presence in our wandering but the darkness of the moment wipes all that away. It's almost like losing power during the night. The darkness is real but we are pretty sure that the power company will get us back on line soon. We may have to move carefully and limit our activities for a bit but we have faith this is not permanent.

That's what the prophet Isaiah is saying. It may be dark now but our Savior will bring light back into our lives. And even more, He will help us be a light to others.

In a few days, we will celebrate the coming of the Christ child into our homes and hearts, this is the light that will banish our darkness, the light of love and hope.

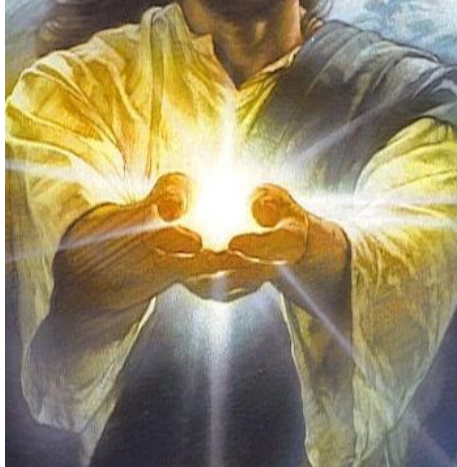
The candle of the prophets, the light of hope and renewal, stands before us as a sign that the darkness will end. That the light of Christ is coming and that light will shine through us to others.

(Light candle)

Jesus said "I am the light of the world"

All: Anyone who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

P 238 - Shine, Jesus, Shine



John 1:1-9 “The Light of Christ”

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

Comment: As we celebrate Christmas this year may we do so knowing that the Christ child can, and will bring light into our darkness. The sorrow and hurts of our lives will pass. They may leave memories, but as we allow the light of Jesus to shine in our hearts, we will be healed.

As we light the Christ candle, let us remember that this light can never be extinguished. Here is a “pillar of fire” we can follow as we walk as children of the light.

(Light candle)

Jesus said “I am the light of the world”

All: Anyone who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

Hymn 490: *I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light*

Responding and Going Forth

Leader: Together we pray:

- **God of Creation, God of the Exodus and of the prophets, God of hope and new birth, give us this night the knowledge and the wisdom we seek.**

- **Come into our hearts and minds bringing us comfort, consolation, health, and healing.**
- **Come into our lives creating anew a sense of joy and thanksgiving as your love seeps into every corner of our being.**
- **We know that Christ is indeed the “light of the world.” We are drawn toward the warmth and assurance that this promise holds out for us.**
- **As we openly acknowledge our pain, our sorrow, our sense of loneliness and the confusion of our lives in this time of celebration, may we also, just as openly, accept the gift of your gracious and freely given love, O God.**
- **Each year this gift comes to us through the birth of a Babe in a humble stable. And each year this gift remains with us through the care, concern, and support of others. May we reach out to each other, just as you reach out to us, most Gracious God.**
- **Together may we walk from the midst of our darkness to the light of your promised peace and new birth. Together may we find joy and hope in the love of this Christmas season.**

Leader: In the name of the one whose birth we
are

about to celebrate, we pray.

All: **Amen.**

Invitation to Light Candles: *All who wish
may come forward to light a candle in
memory of someone or something or as a
sign of hope*



Time of Silence

**H 66: *Come Thou Long Expected
Jesus***

Benediction:

The light has splintered the darkness,
hope is ours once more.
The light calls us forward,
remembering the past
and walking confidently into the future.
Go from this place filled with peace and
love,
God's gift to us all.
Amen.

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