

St. Peter's Lutheran Church
Blue Christmas Service

December 21, 2023 — 6:30 pm

Welcome

As we enter into this time of remembrance and reflection in the presence of God who loves us, please know that you are not alone. Tears are an acceptable offering. Silence is salve for your heart. Candle-light is a reminder of God's presence here. Each breath exhales pain and breathes in the Holy Spirit for healing and life.

Memory Stars



You are invited to write the name of someone to remember or a prayer concern. Please hang it on the blue tree in the gathering space as you leave the service.

Tea Lights

On the rim of your tea light, you are invited to write the name or names of loved ones whom you grieve. During the service, you will be invited to bring it forward, light it, and place it by the altar. Markers may be placed in the basket on your way out.

Taper Candles

During the service, you will be invited to come forward and add a taper to the bowl, speaking the name(s) of people you wish to remember in prayer.

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you. My own peace I give to you."



Call to Worship

Pastor: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by God, and without God nothing came to be. What came to be through God was life, and this life was the light of the world.

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." *John 1:1ff; John 8:12*


People: The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Welcome

Hymn

*Sung by
all standing*

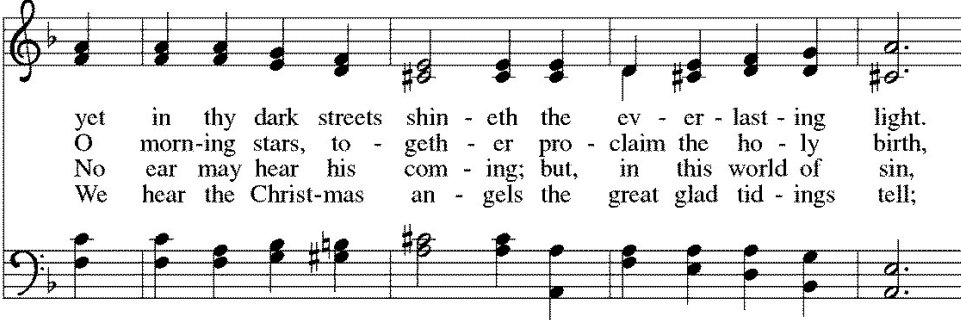
O Little Town of Bethlehem



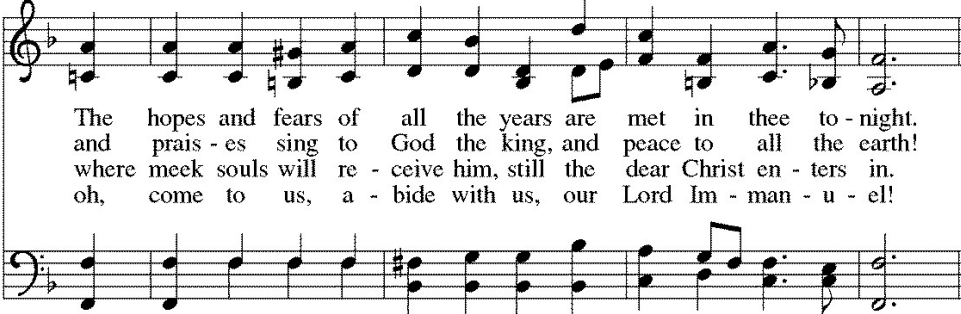
1 O lit - tle town of Beth - le - hem, how still we see thee lie!
2 For Christ is born of Mar - y, and, gath - ered all a - bove
3 How si - lent - ly, how si - lent - ly the won - drous gift is giv'n!
4 O ho - ly child of Beth - le - hem, de - scend to us, we pray;



A - bove thy deep and dream-less sleep the si - lent stars go by;
 while mor-tals sleep, the an - gels keep their watch of won-d'ring love.
 So God im-parts to hu - man hearts the bless - ings of his heav'n.
 cast out our sin, and en - ter in, be born in us to - day.



yet in thy dark streets shin - eth the ev - er - last - ing light.
 O morn-ing stars, to - geth - er pro - claim the ho - ly birth,
 No ear may hear his com - ing; but, in this world of sin,
 We hear the Christ-mas an - gels the great glad tid - ings tell;



The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee to - night.
 and prais - es sing to God the king, and peace to all the earth!
 where meek souls will re - ceive him, still the dear Christ en - ters in.
 oh, come to us, a - bide with us, our Lord Im - man - u - el!

Text: Phillips Brooks, 1835–1893
 Music: ST. LOUIS, Lewis H. Redner, 1831–1908

[All Sit]

First Reading — Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

A reading from Ecclesiastes

For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven. ²A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to harvest. ³A time to kill and a time to heal. A time to tear down and a time to build up. ⁴A time to cry and a time to laugh. A time to grieve and a time to dance. ⁵A time to scatter stones and a time to gather stones. A time to embrace and a time to turn away. ⁶A time to search and a time to quit searching. A time to keep and a time to throw away. ⁷A time to tear and a time to mend. A time to be quiet and a time to speak. ⁸A time to love and a time to hate. A time for war and a time for peace.

Silence for reflection

We can bring our deepest feelings to God, whether happy or sad, delighted or angry, confident or fearful.

Silence for reflection.

Psalm 22 — A faithful lament

All read the boldface verses together

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?

C: 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.

C: 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.

C: 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.

[Pause]

Psalm 23 — An affirmation of God's loving presence

All read together.

C: The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me to lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside the still waters.

He restores my soul; he leads me in the paths of righteousness for his Name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil;
for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head
with oil; my cup runs over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell
in the house of the LORD forever.

Silence for reflection

Second Reading — Isaiah 40 — God's words of comfort and affirmation to us.

[Selected verses]

Silence for reflection

Inspirational Music

If you have not done so already, we invite you to write the names of loved ones on your tea light and prayer concerns on your memory star.

Litany of Remembrance

**The first large candle is lighted.*

(individual remembrance tea light candles are held, unlighted)

Officiant: We light this first candle to remember people whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember clearly, their faces, their voices, their bodies, their personalities. We embrace and give thanks for the memories that bind them to us in this season of expectation when all creation waits for the Light.

C: All: We remember them with love. May God's eternal love surround them.

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 you, O Israel.

A period of silent reflection during which those who wish may bring their candles forward, light them from the single large candle and place them on the table. Then, light a taper and add it to those in the bowl with sand.

**The second large candle is lighted.*

Officiant: We light this second candle to remember the pain of loss: loss of relationships, loss of trust, loss of jobs, loss of health, loss of faith, the loss of joy. We acknowledge and embrace the pain of the past, O God, and we offer it to You, asking that into our wounded hearts and open hands You will place the gift of peace, shalom.

C: All: We remember that through You all things are possible. Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into Your future. O come thou wisdom from on high, who orders all things mightily to us the path of knowledge show, and teach us in her ways to go rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.

A period of silent reflection

**The third large candle is lighted.*

Officiant: We light this third candle to remember ourselves this Christmas time. We pause and remember the past weeks, months, and for some of us years, that have been heavy with our burdens. We accept and lay before you, God, the sharpness of memory, the sadness and grief, the hurt and fear, the anger 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.

C: All: 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 cosmos the dawn will come, and dawn defeats the darkness.

**O come thou Dayspring, 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.**

A period of silent reflection

**The fourth large candle is lighted.*

Officiant: We light this fourth candle to remember faith, the gift of light and hope that God offers to us in the stories of Hanukkah and of Christmas, which both also began in abandonment, insecurity, and humbleness, in a time of war and in a poor stable. We remember that the loving God who kept the light shining in the temple and who came to share this life with us promises us comfort and peace.

**C: All: We remember the One who shares our burdens, who shows us the way to the Light, and who journeys with us into all our tomorrows.
O come Desire of nations, bind in one the hearts of all mankind bid then our sad, divisions cease, and be thyself our King of Peace. Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

A period of silent reflection

The Prayers of the People

(All stand)

Leader: God of wisdom, we come to you this 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 heartssorrow we fear may never end, wounds we cannot even put into words. Lord, hear our prayer,

C: All: And in Your merciful love, answer.

Leader: 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. Lord, hear our prayer.

C: All: And in Your merciful love, answer.

Leader: 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, hear our prayer.

C: All: And in Your merciful love, answer.

Leader: 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, hear our prayer,

C: All: And in Your merciful love, answer.

Officiant: Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick; 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

Hymn

*Sung by all
standing.*

Away in a Manger

1 A - way in a man-ger, no crib for his bed, the lit - tle Lord
2 The cat - tle are low - ing; the ba - by a - wakes, but lit - tle Lord
3 Be near me, Lord Je - sus; I ask you to stay close by me for -

Je - sus laid down his sweet head; the stars in the bright sky looked
Je - sus, no cry - ing he makes. I love you, Lord Je - sus; look
ev - er and love me, I pray. Bless all the dear chil - dren in

down where he lay, the lit - tle Lord Je - sus a - sleep on the hay.
down from the sky and stay by my cra - dle till morn - ing is nigh.
your ten - der care and fit us for heav - en, to live with you there.

Text: North American, 19th cent.
Music: AWAY IN A MANGER, James R. Murray, 1841-1905

Third Reading — Luke 2:10-7 *All sit.*

At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. ²[This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.] ³All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. ⁴And because Joseph

was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. ⁵He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child. ⁶And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. ⁷She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

Offering of Light

Officiant: One story we celebrate in this season tells how a few brave fighters, defending their temple, had only enough oil to light the sacred lamp for one day, but it burned eight days until relief arrived. Another story tells how in a little hill town a homeless couple took shelter in a stable among the animals and gave birth to a light that would change the world. Let us pray.

C: All: Gentle God of love, help us reach out together for the light of faith, for renewal and recovery and a new day coming. Grant that hope may come to rest in our hearts, and let it go forth with us into the darkness, this night and in the nights to come, until we see the dawn.

Officiant: Lighten our darkness, we beseech you, O God; give us light in the night season; and by your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night. Amen.

*During the singing of the hymn, light will come to you to light your handheld candles. Please share the light with others near you. **Tip the unlighted candle to the upright flame.***

Hymn

Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah



- 1 Light one can-dle to watch for Mes-si - ah: let the light ban-ish dark - ness.
- 2 Light two can-dles to watch for Mes-si - ah: let the light ban-ish dark - ness.
- 3 Light three can-dles to watch for Mes-si - ah: let the light ban-ish dark - ness.
- 4 Light four can-dles to watch for Mes-si - ah: let the light ban-ish dark - ness.



He shall bring sal - va - tion to Is - ra - el, God ful - fills the prom - ise.
 He shall feed the flock like a shep-herd, gent - ly lead them home-ward.
 Lift your heads and lift high the gate-way for the King of glo - ry.
 He is com - ing, tell the glad tid - ings. Let your lights be shin - ing!

Prayer

(All stand)

Officiant: Let us pray.

C: All: Almighty God, we thank you for your constant love and for the blessings of this day. We know that even when we cannot see or feel you, you are still there. Help us to remember you and to listen for your voice in the words of family, friends, and strangers. Kindle our hearts and awaken hope, that we may know you as you reveal yourself in the world and in our lives. Let the light of your Holy Spirit shine like these candles in the darkness, lighting the way for all who feel despairing, lost, or forgotten, and grant that it may come to dwell so deeply in our hearts that when we leave this place it may shine on, for us and for those we meet along the way. Amen.

Hymn

(Sung by all, standing.)

Silent Night, Holy Night!

Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht!

Stil - le Nacht, hei - li - ge Nacht! Al - les schläft,
 1 Si - lent night, ho - ly night! All is calm,
 2 Si - lent night, ho - ly night! Shep - herds quake
 3 Si - lent night, ho - ly night! Son of God,

ein - sam wacht nur das trau - te, hoch - hei - li - ge Paar.
 all is bright round yon vir - gin moth - er and child.
 at the sight; glo - ries stream from heav - en a - far,
 love's pure light ra - diant beams from your ho - ly face,

Hol - der Kna - be im lok - ki - gen Haar, schlaf in himm - li - scher
 Ho - ly In - fant, so ten - der and mild, sleep in heav - en - ly
 heav'n - ly hosts . . . sing, al - le - lu - ia! Christ, the Sav - ior, is
 with the dawn of re - deem - ing grace, Je - sus, Lord, at your



Ruh, schlaf in himm - li - scher Ruh.
 peace, sleep in heav - en - ly peace.
 born! Christ, the Sav - ior, is born!
 birth, Je - sus, Lord, at your birth.

Text: Joseph Mohr, 1792–1849; tr. John F. Young, 1820–1885
 Music: STILLE NACHT, Franz Gruber, 1787–1863

Concluding Prayers

(Remain standing.)

Psalm 122 – a prayer of hope and confidence in God

(All read together.)

I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?

²My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

³He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.

⁴Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

⁵The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand.

⁶The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

⁷The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.

**⁸The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in
 from this time forth and forevermore**

Officiant: Let us pray.

C: All: Another day will come, O God. I know not what it may bring forth, but make me ready 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.

Officiant: 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. **C: Amen.**

Blessing and Dismissal

Officiant: 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. **Amen.**

Officiant: Go in the peace of the Lord and serve him with a calm spirit.

C: People: Thanks be to God.

People may greet one another in the name of the Lord.



"The 'Blue Christmas' service used today/tonight is adapted from an order developed and used at The Cathedral Church of Saint Andrew, Honolulu Hawaii."

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CHRISTMAS EVENTS

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES

Sunday, DECEMBER 24

3:30 PM — St. Peter's Lutheran

7:00 PM — Christ, Manchester

10:00 PM — St. Peter's Lutheran

CHRISTMAS DAY SERVICE

Monday, DECEMBER 25

10:00 AM [NO 8:45am service]

St. Peter's Lutheran

POTLUCK BRUNCH PARTY AFTER SERVICE

1st Sunday of Christmas

Sunday, DECEMBER 31, 10:30 AM

St. Peter's Lutheran

Carol singing following to follow.



EPIPHANY WORSHIP

Sundays, JANUARY 7 thru FEBRUARY 11

At St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 25 W. Springettsbury Ave., York

8:00 AM — Early Service [No 8:45 AM service at St. Peter's]

At Christ Lutheran, Manchester — 10:30 AM

* Ash Wednesday Service, 3:30 PM — at St. Peter's

* * Sunday, FEBRUARY 18 — Worship will resume at St. Peter's Lutheran

St. Peter's Lutheran Church
947 North George Street, York PA 17404
8:45 AM—Worship Service

Church Staff

The Reverend Beth A. Schlegel, <i>STS</i>	Pastor
Terri Schroll	Secretary
Kristen Hartman—Susan Hartman	Sextons

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