

Blue Christmas Worship



God is our refuge
and strength

Psalm 46

December 21, 2023 7:00 pm

Grace Lutheran Church

Somers Point, NJ

Grace Lutheran Church

11 East Dawes Ave., Somers Point, New Jersey 08244

Phone: 609-927-3082—Food Pantry: 609-927-9982

Email: office@gracelutheranspnj.com [castbiz.net](mailto:office@gracelutheranspnj.com)

Website: www.gracelutheranspnj.org

Pastor: Rev. Althea Albright **Music Director:** Mr. Scott J. Breiner

Administrative Assistant: Corinne Rhodes

Social Media Consultant: Alison Toth

WELCOME TO GRACE'S FAMILY OF FAITH

We welcome you this day as we prepare our hearts and minds for a new year ahead. We hope you feel comfortable in this place, and we hope you come again soon. Everyone may join us whether you are a member, friend, neighbor, or just plain curious how we worship here.

We are all human. We are not perfect and we are each unique. You are welcome whether you like to sing or worship in silence. You are welcome whether you are struggling with your faith or love the God of your understanding with all your heart. All are welcome in this place. We believe God is present with us as we come together to worship especially on this holy night when we celebrate Jesus' birth.

For where two or three are gathered in my name I am there among them.

Matthew 18:20

Pastor Althea also invites you to contact her if you would like to receive prayer or information about our faith, worship style, or our church. **Please sign our Visitor Book located in the lobby** (Narthex area) before you leave tonight. Pastor Althea would love to be in touch with you.

No matter where your head and heart may be thinking and feeling this holiday season, we, here at Grace, wish you a **Merry Christmas and Happy and Healthy New Year!**

GATHERING

PRELUDE

Blue Christmas

by Hayes and Johnson

Sometimes life is good and beautiful and we enjoy celebration, yet there are also times we go through painful loss, stress, or other transitions in life. Christmas has taken on a life of its own in our society. It is not a joyous occasion for everyone. It can be hard to put words to the holiday season when we are not feeling the same way as others. We may even feel afraid, angry, ashamed, or deeply sad.

Tonight we come together to open our hearts to God and seek comfort, healing, and peace. Though we may not leave here feeling as celebratory as others, we can give ourselves permission and space to feel whatever emotions come our way.

WELCOME

Rev. Althea Albright

Please stand as you are able.

CALL TO WORSHIP *(adapted from Psalm 13:3-6)*

Consider me, look at me, God, for you are my Lord and my God;

Give light to my eyes so no enemy can get the best of me or rejoice because I am shaken

We come before you God, seeking your listening ear, longing for peace, looking for answers. We come to you God, because you are our Creator, you know us inside and out.

I throw myself to your arms, I trust in your steadfast love my heart will rejoice when you rescue me.

We come searching for hope. We wait for your voice to speak to us and call us from beyond our fear, our sadness, and our anger.

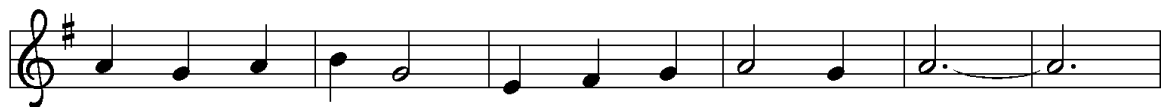
HYMN *Christ Be Our Light* (VERSE 1, 3, 5 ALL, 2 MEN, 4 WOMEN)



1 Long - ing for light, we wait in dark - ness. Long - ing for
2 Long - ing for peace, our world is trou - bled. Long - ing for
3 Long - ing for food, man - y are hun - gry. Long - ing for
4 Long - ing for shel - ter, man - y are home - less. Long - ing for
5 Man - y the gifts, man - y the peo - ple, man - y the



truth, we turn to you. Make us your own,
hope, man - y de - spair. Your word a - lone
wa - ter, man - y still thirst. Make us your bread,
warmth, man - y are cold. Make us your build - ing,
hearts that yearn to be - long. Let us be ser - vants



your ho - ly peo - ple, light for the world to see.
has pow'r to save us. Make us your liv - ing voice.
bro - ken for oth - ers, shared un - til all are fed.
shel - ter - ing oth - ers, walls made of liv - ing stone.
to one an - oth - er, signs of your king - dom come.



Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the



dark - ness. Christ, be our light! Shine in your



church gath - ered to - day.

OPENING PRAYER

May the Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Let us pray. God of all mercy and consolation, you have given us grace to pray with one heart and one voice, even though our hearts are broken and our voices tremble with many emotions known only to you.

Comfort your people, Lord. Comfort all who sit in darkness and all of us who struggle this night. Speak comfort and love to our hearts and bring peace upon our wounded spirits. We ask all these things as we trust in your promises to hear the prayers of all who gather in the name of your Holy Child, Jesus. **Amen.**

Please be seated.

PRAYER OF LAMENT *(adapted from Psalms 13, 47, 49)*

Do not remember the sins of our ancestors, may your compassion come quickly to meet us where we are, for we find ourselves very low. God of our salvation, help us for the glory of your name, deliver us, and forgive us, for your name's sake especially at times when the world asks, "Where is their God?"

Our earthly world can seem dark and we can feel alone sometimes. We long for help. Sometimes we seek solutions which hurt us even more. Hear our cries, God of mercy.

How long O Lord, how long will you hide your face from me?
Have you forgotten me Lord? How long must I manage to just survive when my mind suffers every day? How long will my enemies rise against me?

Life can seem unmanageable at times. Sometimes things fall apart and we are hurt and confused. We question many things. We look to you, God, for guidance. See our situation and hear us, God of hope.

Arise, God, and plead my cause, that the poor and those in need may rejoice. Do not forget the cry of your foes rebelling against you.

We are tempted to trust only in ourselves and what we have known. We are often angry and afraid. We call on you and we plead that you hear our prayers. For you are the one who created us.

ASSURANCE *(adapted from Psalm 46)*

God is our refuge and our strength.

God is a safe place to run to when we are upset and feeling lost.

God is present with us when we are in trouble.

We stand fearless at the edge of doom, and courageous in sea storms
and earthquakes,

before the rush and roar of oceans, the tremors that shift mountains.

God fights for us, and our God who is the God of angel armies
protects us. The Lord of hosts is with us.

WORD

Please stand as you are able.

GOSPEL READING - LUKE 2:8-20

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them,

“Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.”

So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them, and Mary treasured all these words and pondered

them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them. The Gospel of our Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Please be seated.

MEDITATION

Rev. Althea Albright

HYMN

It Came upon the Midnight Clear

ELW #282

PRAYERS

Let us pause to pray for the world, our nation, our community, and for one another in this holiday season.

God who is with us, in this season of anticipating the holidays and the new year, we sometimes find ourselves uncomfortable, uneasy, worried, sad, and feeling other emotions too. There are times we feel disconnected, unsettled, and different. Be with us as we face these feelings, calm our spirits and comfort our souls, that we may claim your promises to always be by our side.

Brief silence Let us pray to God, **O come, O come, Emmanuel.**

God of light and life, we come to you bringing concern for all those who struggle with alcohol and substance addiction, gambling addiction, food addiction, self-harm, pornography, cancer, disease, COVID-19, chronic illness, depression, anxiety, suicide, job loss, financial concerns, extreme debt, and any other physical, mental, and spiritual illness. We pray that your light will illumine their lives and break the chains of their temptations.

Brief silence Let us pray to God, **O come, O come, Emmanuel.**

God of peace and comfort, we pray for all who are victims of violence in its many forms. We pray for those experiencing the consequences of war, famine, disease, and natural disasters. Protect all those who are far from home serving their country or serving in support to those in need. Give encouragement to all those who are looking for help, looking for hope, and those who are healing physically, mentally, and spiritually. Grant that we may trust that you are in the midst of all who need your touch, that your healing presence will be seen and felt through your

Holy Spirit, and through all those working to alleviate suffering.

Brief silence Let us pray to God, **O come, O come, Emmanuel.**

God of love, we ask for your presence with all who are dealing with broken relationships with family, friends, spouses, and children. Remind us that you wish for us to be in uplifting and loving relationships. Lead us to repair the relationships which are life-giving. Lead us to forgiveness for others and for ourselves in relationships where we have been hurt or where we have hurt others. Be with us as we prayerfully examine other relationships which are harmful or difficult for us.

Brief silence Let us pray to God, **O come, O come, Emmanuel.**

God of new life, send your spirit to all who grieve many kinds of losses- loss of family, loss of friends, loss of dreams and opportunities. Jesus experienced the death of friends and the pain of suffering. You know and understand our pain and our deepest needs. Let your light remind us we are not alone, and grant us grace so that we may find hope in our sorrow, comfort in your peace beyond our understanding, and in times of death, resurrection.

Brief silence Let us pray to God, **O come, O come, Emmanuel.**

We come to you this night, O God, also in prayer for all those who are estranged from you. Be with all people who are overwhelmed by this world, all who are overcome by doubts of your goodness and love, and all who long for your presence in their lives. We pray for them and for times when we feel far away from you or in times when we doubt your mercy, forgiveness, grace, and love. Encourage us and empower us that we may hear your voice and feel your Spirit as you lead us home to you.

Brief silence Let us pray to God, **O come, O come, Emmanuel.**

LITURGY OF REMEMBERING AT THE ADVENT WREATH

The first candle we light is to remember those whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember their name, their face, their voice, and the memory we hold of them. **May God's eternal love continue to surround them.**

The second candle we light is to redeem the pain of the loss, this loss of someone very important to us, part of our lives, part of our own selves. We pause to gather this pain and offer it to God, asking that God grant us peace. **Refresh us, restore us, and renew us, O God. Lead us into the future path of our own journey.**

The third candle we light is to honor ourselves this holiday season. We pause and we remember all of the stress, disbelief, times of feeling down, anger, sadness, times of feeling alone. We also think of all the affection and support we have received and we give thanks for the people in our lives who have helped us. **The love of God, the light of Christ, and the peace of the Holy Spirit defeats death, darkness, and all the things of this world.**

The fourth candle is lit to remember our faith and God's gift of hope that the Christmas story offers to us. We remember God's promises to us that one day there will be no more pain and no more suffering. **Let us remember Christ, the One who shows us the way, brings us the truth, and who bears the light.**

God beckons us as we wait for a future that is yet unknown.

TIME FOR HEALING AND ANOINTING

During this time for healing and anointing, you are all invited to come forward as you are able for brief prayer with Pastor Althea and anointing with oil. Pastor will be using disposable cotton q-tips for anointing. Do not feel rushed. Please let an usher know if you would like prayer where you are seated. Pastor will come to you.

MEDITATION

Please meditate or pray quietly at your seat while others receive prayers in the front of the church. When all who wish to have prayer and anointing have come forward and then are seated again the service will continue below.

PEACE May the peace of Christ be with you always. **And also with you.**

HYMN *O Lord, Hear My Prayer* ELW # 751 (repeat a few times)



O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer: when I call, an - swer me.
OR *The Lord is my song, the Lord is my praise: all my hope comes from God.*



O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer: come and lis - ten to me.
The Lord is my song, the Lord is my praise: God, the well-spring of life.



PRAYER OF BLESSING (*adapted from Psalm 73*)

When my mind is unsettled, when I feel deeply sad, angry, dressed,
or foolish without understanding

**I will remember that you, God, are near even when I feel far
away. I will remember that you are my refuge and my strength.**

When I feel alone, upset, or misunderstood

**I will remember that you, God, are always with me. You are
with me in the quiet of night and the light of day. You are holding my
hand and guiding me with your counsel. You are leading me toward
your glory.**

When I question who is on my side, when I feel lonely, when I feel
exhausted, or outcast

**I will remember that you, God, are by my side. I will be still and
remember the peace you bring to my heart and mind beyond all
understanding.**

When we don't always have the words to pray, be near us, and hear the unspoken prayers of our hearts. We also remember that we can pray as you taught us:

**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.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever
and ever. Amen.**

As we sing the next hymn, Pastor welcomes everyone to light candles as prayers for concerns we wish to lift to God and for anyone on our hearts this night.

HYMN *Silent Night, Holy Night* **ELW (red book) #281**

- 1 Silent night, holy night! All is calm, all is bright
 round yon virgin mother and child. Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
 sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.
- 2 Silent night, holy night! Shepherds quake at the sight;
 glories stream from heaven afar, heav'nly hosts sing, alleluia!
 Christ, the Savior, is born! Christ, the Savior, is born!
- 3 Silent night, holy night! Son of God, love's pure light
 radiant beams from your holy face, with the dawn of redeeming grace,
 Jesus, Lord, at your birth, Jesus, Lord, at your birth.

Text: Joseph Mohr, 1792-1849; tr. John F. Young, 1820-1885

SENDING BLESSING

May God strengthen you and uphold you as you depart from this place. May you feel Jesus close by your side always. May the Holy Spirit encourage you and bring you peace. **Amen.**

POSTLUDE

White Christmas

by Irving Berlin

I'm dreaming of a white Christmas
Just like the ones I used to know
Where the treetops glisten and children listen
To hear sleigh bells in the snow

I'm dreaming of a white Christmas
With every Christmas card I write
May your days be merry and bright
And may all your Christmases be white

I'm dreaming of a white Christmas
Just like the ones I used to know
Where the treetops glisten and children listen
To hear sleigh bells in the snow

I'm dreaming of a white Christmas
With every Christmas card I write
May your days be merry and bright
And may all your Christmases be white.

DISMISSAL Go in peace and keep Christ in your heart. **Thanks be to God!**



All are welcome to join us on
Christmas Eve

December 24, 2023

Candle Lighting with Holy Communion

7:00pm & 9:00pm