

Leader: Keep despair without and hope within;

People: be our deliverance that we may rejoice.

Leader: Come, O Advent God,

People: and reveal your promise in us now.

Leader: In the silence of our hearts, let us search for a light of promise – a small glimmer of light. We cup our hands around it to keep it shining in the darkness. We cradle it with tenderness as it glows brighter through the grace and care of God.

A Silence is Kept.

LIGHTING THE CANDLES

The people may come forward to light candles, small lights which symbolize the light of hope, even in the dark night of grief. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it.

HYMN Silent Night

STATEMENT OF AFFIRMATION

Leader: O God, we believe.

People: Help us in our unbelief.

Leader: In faith and with a heart that lies open to the distant sounds of singing, let us lift up our eyes to see the flickering light of hope. That light burns within us, and surrounds us with warmth. That light is just beyond us in the sunrise of God's promise. That light is all around us in the bright sun of God's grace.

People: In the power of the Holy Spirit, and among the prayers of the universal church as it prepares to celebrate the coming of the Christ, our tears become the water of life for the growing of fragile hopes. Our tiny candles spread their light to fill the room, even as the Light of the World comes to fill our hearts with hope.

BENEDICTION **Blessing for the Longest Night**

You are welcome to stay and pray for a time. There will be pastors here to pray with you.



Tuesday, December 21, 5:00 PM
First Presbyterian Church

You will find inside this bulletin a printed card. You are invited to use this card to express your prayers, your sorrows, your grief, your joy. You may wish to write the name of a loved one you have lost, or a word that is the cry of your heart. You can bring this card as you come to light a candle, and leave it in the basket you see there. What you have written will not be shared in the service, but the ministers here have committed to take these cards and pray for those who have brought them. You need not write your name on the card.

WORDS OF WELCOME

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: We gather here because God has brought us together to remember, and to tell the story again.

People: It is a story of hope, a story of life.

Leader: And yet there is a shadow of fear, of uncertainty. We wonder if it can really happen again.

People: May God illuminate our lives.

Leader: As we fill our hearts with the hope of a baby in a manger,

People: May God open our eyes to new birth in our lives.

HYMN O Come, O Come, Immanuel

OPENING PRAYER

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 debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen .

SHARING THE PEACE OF CHRIST

Leader: The night seems dark and it is hard to see the guiding star above us. [...] If we dare to look, will we find a glimpse of loving kindness breaking through?

People: We seek the light of the world.

Leader: Peace be with you.

People: And also with you.

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLES

Leader: In a time of great darkness, even the promise of light can brighten the world. [...] This is the light of peace.

People: This first candle we light to remember those whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember their names, their faces, their voices, the memory that binds them to us in this season. We rest in the light of peace.

Leader: John was a witness to the light, the one who came before to prepare a way. [...] This is the light of hope.

People: We light the second candle to redeem the pain of loss: of relationships, of jobs, of health. We gather up the pain of the past and offer it to God, asking that from God's hands we receive the gift of hope.

Leader: With this birth will come the fulfillment of the promise, the accomplishment of that which was prophesied: the Messiah, God -with-us. [...] This is the light of joy.

People: As we remember the past: weeks, months and years; the disbelief, the anger, the down times, we recall also the sharing, the hugs and handshakes of family and friends, all those who stood with us. We give thanks for all the support we have been given, and the memories we treasure. May God renew our joy.

Leader: So much of the story is obscured to us now. [...] This is the light of love.

People: God who shares our life promises us a place and time of no more pain and suffering, where only love shines all around us. Let us remember the one who shows the way, who brings the truth and who bears the light of love in us today and always.

HYMN While We Are Waiting, Come

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Leader: Keep shadows without and light within;

People: let your face shine that we may be saved.

Leader: Keep fear without and justice within;

People: comfort, comfort your people.

Leader: Keep chaos without and life within;

People: may those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.