

Elm Grove United Methodist Church



December 18, 2022

Prelude

Anita Chops

The Gathering of the Community

*Prayer

Merciful God, your compassion for us overflows.

We come burdened with sorrow, loneliness, and sadness.

We come seeking a place to set them down; a place where our words will be heard and our feelings honored.

We need a place where we can drop our masks of good cheer so our tears can flow freely and our faces can wear the cares of all that we are carrying.

Be among us this night, O God. Let your compassion heal us in this moment.

Comfort us. Strengthen us. Care for us. Be Christ to us. Amen.

Welcome

The Liturgy of the Word

Psalm 121

One: I will lift up my eyes to the hills, from where is my help to come?

***All:* My help comes from the LORD, the maker of heaven and earth.**

One: He will not let your foot be moved and he who watches over you will not fall asleep.

***All:* Behold, he who keeps watch over Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.**

One: The LORD himself watches over you; the LORD is your shade at your right hand.

***All:* So that the sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.**

One: The LORD shall preserve you from all evil; it is he who shall keep you safe.

***All:* The LORD shall watch over your going out and your coming in, from this time forth for ever.**

One: Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 11:28-30

Hymn

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

#211, v.1

A Time of Remembrance

Lighting of the First Candle

***All:* LORD, each of us takes our loved one by the hand and leads them to you, the God of love. Here we present them to you.**

Accept our love and thanksgiving as we entrust them to your loving care.

We want our loved ones to be free at home with you.

We ask that you save a place for us beside them.

We ask that you fill us with motivation and energy in the days ahead when we feel like giving up; remind us often of our true homeland when we are caught up in the desolation of the journey. Help us to find joy in the people, events and the beauty of nature which surrounds us.

Thank you for the gift each of these people has been in our lives. We want to believe that we will celebrate the treasure of love with them again, when we are all in your presence forever. May this truth sustain us in the days to come. Take our sad and aching hearts and comfort us.

Comfort us, for we only feel hollowness and emptiness.

God of sorrowing, draw near! Amen.

Hymn

“O Come, O Come Emmanuel”

#211, v.5

Lighting of the Second Candle

***All:* God of mystery, we turn our hearts to you.**

We come before you in need of peace, grateful for the mystery of life and ever keenly aware of your promises of guidance and protection.

We want to place our trust in you, but our hearts grow fearful and anxious.

We forget so easily that you will be with us in all that we experience.

Teach us to be patient with the transformation of our lives and to be open to the changes which we are now going through. Amen.

Hymn

“O Come, O Come Emmanuel”

#211, v.7

Lighting the Third Candle

All: God of our depths, we cry out to you to be our guide.

Help us to have a strong sense of inner direction and grant that we may have the reassurance of knowing that we are on the right path. Take our lives and use them according to your will. Take all that is lost in us and bring it home with you. Amen.

Hymn

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

#211; v.2

Lighting the Fourth Candle

All: O God whose spirit is known by those whose hearts are thankful, and who makes cheerfulness a companion of strength, lift up our hearts, we pray, to a joyous confidence in your care.

Guide us when we cannot see the way.

Teach us to know that a shadow is only a shadow, because the light of eternal goodness shines behind the object of our fears.

Where there is love in life, teach us to find it; help us to trust it and enable us to grow in the power of love.

So may our lives bring comfort and encouragement to others.

We ask it, in the name of Jesus Christ whose life is our light. Amen.

Hymn

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

#211; v.6

Prayers of the People

One: In the spirit of this season let us now confidently ask our God for all the good things we need.

For ourselves as we participate in this Christmas as special people coping with our many different losses. God, hear our prayer.

All: And in your mercy, answer.

One: For our families and friends that they may continue to help and support us. God, hear our prayer.

All: And in your mercy, answer.

One: For any person we have loved who has died, for all the losses we know in our lives, that all may be redeemed by your Easter promise. God, hear our prayer.

All: And in your mercy, answer.

One: For our family and friends, that you may bless them with love, peace, and joy. God, hear our prayer.

All: And in your mercy, answer.

One: For peace throughout the world as proclaimed by the Angels on that faraway hillside. God, hear our prayer.

All: And in your mercy, answer.

One: For greater understanding of the lessons of love and acceptance as taught by Jesus. God, hear our prayer.

All: And in your mercy, answer.

One: God of great compassion and love, listen to the prayers of these your people.
Grant to all, especially the bereaved and troubled ones this Christmas, the blessing we ask
in the name of Jesus.

The Great Thanksgiving

We give you thanks, O God, for light in spite of darkness: In the beginning when the earth was a
murky, chaotic abyss, you brought forth light and life.

In the beginning was your Word, who came to dwell among us as the light that shines in the abyss,
the light which no darkness can ever overcome.

On the last night Jesus gathered to share a meal with his closest friends and followers, the night
that he would be betrayed and handed over to death, he took a loaf of bread, gave thanks to God,
despite it all, broke it, and gave it to all who were gathered, saying:

*“Take and eat. This is my body, my very presence, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of
me.”*

Again after the meal was almost over, he took the cup, gave thanks yet again, and gave it for all to
drink, saying: *“This cup is the new covenant in my blood, the new promise represented by my life,
poured out for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin and the manifestation of God’s love
for the whole world. Do this for the remembrance of me.”*

Pour out your spirit, O God, on this meal, and on this weary people, your own beloved people,
gathered here.

Enliven us with your presence, strengthen us at your table, and send us out to a world in need, to
be light for each other, to carry one another’s burdens.

The LORD’S Prayer

And now, with the confidence, of children of God, let us pray:

**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.**

Come all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens.
Come and seek the promised rest of God.
Come and be renewed by the feast of abundance and love.

The body of Christ, given for you. **Amen.**
The blood of Christ, given for you. **Amen.**

Lighting of Individual Candles

Each of us comes bearing our own hurts, sorrows, broken places. I want to invite each of you to
offer your personal wound to the God who loves each of us deeply and wants to carry our pain.
God waits patiently, gently calling out: *“Give me your pain, come to me... all who labor and are
heavy laden, I will refresh you!”*

As you light the candle, remember that it is God who lights a candle in our darkness and holds us close until we are able to shine.

If you wish, you may come forward and kneel at the altar rail for prayer and a blessing.

These lights in their brightness are only symbols, but as they burn and finally go out, we remember that suffering passes, though memory remains forever.

*Closing Hymn

“Silent Night, Holy Night”

#239

*Benediction

As we gathered here this evening, we embrace and claim the darkness that is present both in the world and in our own lives.

As people who are familiar with the darkness, we also know that we gather to be illumined by the light of the Christ Child this Christmas season.

May the Christ Child, born in a lowly stable, himself an outcast and marginal, bring light, comfort, peace, and joy this holiday season.

One: May the hope of the Christ Child sustain us through this darkness.

***All:* That together we may shine again. Amen.**

*Postlude

Anita Chops

***Everyone is invited for fellowship & refreshments
following the service.***