



Longest Night

Hope Mennonite Church
Longest Night Service
December 21, 2023
6:30 pm

Prelude

Ruthie Goering

Welcome

*Call to worship

We gather as day turns to memory
and night is drawn across the land.

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

The dark of night can seem pale
to one whose life is shrouded by sorrow.

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

Where do we go when our eyes cannot see you?
How can we sing when the light grows so dim?

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

Find us in the nighttime of grief,
illumine the pathways through our loss,
and guide us toward the dawn.

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

*"We Come"

Voices Together 225

Silent reflections

**Which is the way to the home of the light, O God?
 When will we know the rising of joy?
 You have set the patterns of the night and the day,
 you are the life that is the light to all people.
 Come to us now, O God,
 and to all who know where the darkness lives.
 Come, and lead us to the home of the light. Amen.**

Scripture

John 1:1-14

“Joyful is the Dark”

Voices Together 281

Meditation

“Welcoming the Darkness”

Randy Quinn

A ritual of remembering

Candle lighting

“Tender Mercies”

Treva Greaser

“Longing for Light”

Voices Together 715

Benediction

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Welcome to our Longest Night service; a service designed to offer a place to honor the sense of loss many people feel at this time of the year. Taking place on the evening of the winter solstice, we use the imagery of the long cold night and provide a place to ponder and reflect with others who are experiencing their own grief. May this service touch your heart and soul.

<p>Worship Participants</p> <p>Worship leader: Randy Quinn</p> <p>Pianist: Ruthie Goering</p> <p>Song leader: Lowell Birkey</p> <p>Worship tech: Randy Pinkerton</p>
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The poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote "Christmas Bells" after the death of his wife, Francis, who died from burns after her nightgown caught fire; and the severe wounding of his son, Charles, who enlisted without Longfellow's blessing during the Civil War. The poem reflects both his sadness over the war that was tearing his family and his country apart, his own personal pain, and his continuing hope in the power of God. He wrote it on Christmas Day in 1863, after Gettysburg, but before it was clear the war was turning; there was still no end in sight.

We often leave out some of the key verses explaining Longfellow's motivation for writing it, so here it is with the missing stanzas restored:

*I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
and wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to
men!*

*And thought how,
as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along
The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to
men!*

*Till ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to
day,
A voice, a chime,
A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to
men!*

*Then from each black,
accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the
South,
And with the sound*

*The carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to
men!*

*It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn
The households born
Of peace on earth, good-will to
men!*

*And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I
said;
"For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to
men!"*

*Then pealed the bells
more loud and deep:
"God is not dead, nor doth He
sleep;
The Wrong shall fail,
The Right prevail,
With peace on earth,
good-will to men."*

Restoring the lost context of the grieving husband and father seeking some comfort from his pain gives us a window into the complex layers of emotions that Christmas can bring. Far from watered down and shallow, the meaning of this carol - at least for Longfellow - is rich and hopeful, and while the original inspiration for the context is long gone, the depth of emotion behind it still resonates with people today.