**Longest Night Service**



**The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.**

**Isaiah 9:2**

**December 20, 2020**

**6:30 p.m.**

**Trinity United Church of Christ**

**Offered via**

**Zoom.com**

**Contact Pastor Hanberry at** **pastortucc@comcast.net** **for Zoom link.**

*“Someone I loved once gave me a box full of darkness.*

*It took me years to understand that this, too, was a gift*.”

— Mary Oliver (from *Thirst*, Beacon Press, Boston, 2006)

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For many people the holiday season is one filled with loneliness and grief, confusion and worry. In the midst of a season of light, the Longest Night Service honors the darkness that is also a part of life. Through music and scripture, ritual and prayer, we will gain strength from each other. This service can be a special gift to those outside our church families who are in need of comfort and support.

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Trinity United Church of Christ welcomes you to the *‘Longest Night’* service. We hope the service will acknowledge the need for healing and give hope when grief, illness, sadness and/or loss are present during Christmas.  We hope this is a reminder of the Christ light that shines in the midst of darkness.

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**The Good News Gift of Christmas**

**December 24 – Christmas Eve 6:30 p.m.**

**BROADCAST ONLY ON FB LIVE AND YOUTUBE**

**No In-Person Worship**

Theme: “The Good News Gift of Christmas”

– Service of Candles and Carols

Scriptures: Isaiah 62:6-12; Ps 97; Titus 3:4-7; & Luke 2:1-20

Sermon: “The Good News Night of the Our Lives”

Lots of traditional Christmas Eve Singing

Zoom Christmas Eve social gathering after the Broadcast of the Christmas Eve Service at about 7:30 p.m.

**gathering music “Wait for the Lord” Taize**

[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7GexIvX8HU**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7GexIvX8HU)

**WELCOME**

**Call to Worship**

Leader: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

**ALL: The Word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth.**

Leader: In the word was life, and that life was the light of all.

**ALL: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never been able to put it out.**

**Hymn “In the Bleak Midwinter”**  <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VAQ2MZxxlvI>

**Opening Prayer (In Unison)**

**God of love and understanding, we gather here this evening to confront our pain in the midst of the world’s celebration. Help us to know that you are present with us in all our moods and feelings and seasons. Grant us a taste of the hope, love, joy and peace that you promise to all of your people through the gift of your child, Jesus. Amen**

**A Responsive Reading: “Darkness is where incarnation begins”**

Reader 1 (MB Brainerd) The gorgeous texts of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany shimmer with the light that God brings into our midst,

as in the prologue to John’s Gospel:

**ALL: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it (John 1:5).**

Reader 2 (Pat Hanberry): Yet if we lean too quickly toward the light,

we miss seeing one of the greatest gifts this season has to offer us:

**ALL: that the deepest darkness is the place where God comes to us.**

Reader 3 (Other): In the womb, in the night, in the dreaming;

when we are lost, when our world has come undone,

when we cannot see the next step on the path; in all the darkness that attends our life, whether hopeful or horrendous,

**ALL: God meets us.**

Reader 1: God’s first priority is not to do away with the dark but to be present to us in it:

“I will give you the treasures of darkness, and riches hidden in secret places.”

**ALL: For the Christ who was born two millennia ago,**

**for the Christ who seeks to be born in us this day,**

**the darkness is where incarnation begins.**

Readers 1, 2 & 3: Can we imagine the darkness as a place where God meets us — and not only meets us, but asks to take form in this world through us?

(Jan Richardson in “The Luminous Darkness: Searching for Solace in Advent and Christmas” from online resource *The Advent Door*.)

**Reading (MB Brainerd)** *Isaiah 43:1-2*

But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

Leader: The word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

**Psalm (Pat Hanberry)** *Psalm 121*

1I lift up my eyes to the hills from where will my help come?
**2My help comes from the God, who made heaven and earth.**

3God will not let your foot be moved;

 The one who keeps you will not slumber.

**4The one who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.**

5God is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
**6The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.**

7God will keep you from all evil; and will keep your life.
**8God will keep your going out and**

 **your coming in from this time on and for evermore.**

Leader: The Holy Gospel according to Matthew, the 11th chapter:

**People: Glory to you, O Lord.**

**gospel** *Matthew 1:18-25*

Leader: The Gospel of the Lord.

**People: Praise to you, O Christ.**

**Homily “Living in the Tensions”** *Pastor Gerry*

**Hymn** *“What Child Is This”*

Sung by Darius Rucker

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ud2mHuNhoM&list=RD4ud2mHuNhoM&start_radio=1>

**Prayers+**

Pastor: Loving God, who in Christ has shown us how to live and the way to love, we would not pray only for ourselves, but think of all those who carry the burden of loss.

**All: We pray for all who will walk lonely hospital wards, anxiously watching and waiting with loved ones.**

Pastor: As evening comes we think of those who are alone, perhaps for the first time at Christmas.

**All: We remember before you all who are estranged from family and friends, and bear the added burden of hurt, anger, guilt, or shame.**

Pastor: We pray for all who are suffering through illness, hostility, hunger, or homelessness.

**All: You lived among and for the poor and needy. You poured out your love upon all.**

Pastor: Come among our need this season. Grant the gentle touch of your presence to heal and relieve, to comfort and to strengthen. Come in the person of one of your followers.

**All: Come in the fullness of your Spirit, for we would know, in every land and every home, goodwill to all and peace among humankind.**

Pastor: We pray this in the power of your Holy Name.

**All: Amen.**

Pastor: The peace of the Lord be with you all.

**All: And also with you.**

**CANDLELIGHTING AND REMEMBRANCE**

(You are invited to light a candle in memory of a loved one, or for a circumstance or event that makes this season difficult for you.)

**Blessing (In Unison) Pastor Gerry**

**May we be gentle with ourselves, remembering that we are created in the image of God. May we go into the world with honesty and gratitude, embracing tears, laughter, and all that is good. May the protection of God comfort us, may the courage of Jesus sustain us, and may the tenderness of the Sprit embrace us. Amen.**

**DEPART IN SILENCE**

*Pastor*

The Rev. Dr. Gerry C Hanberry

Trinity United Church of Christ

*Music*

Cammeron Williams

Trinity UCC

Director of Music

**Notes for your own reflections:**

* What makes this season a struggle for you?
* Where is joy in the midst of your uncertainty?
* What or who are your remembering?
* For what or whom will you light your candle?

Christmas Eve

Worship Services

**Trinity United Church of Christ**

**6:30pm** “The Good News Gift of Christmas:

 **A Pre-recorded Service of Carols and the Word for the Holy Scriptures Broadcast via FaceBook Live Steaming at** [**www.Facebook.com**](http://www.Facebook.com)**: Manchester Trinity United Church of Christ. If you miss the service Christmas Eve you may watch it later on FB the same FaceBook page.**