

*December 21, 2023*

*the  
Longest  
Night*

We do not come to fresh candles and light them  
without acknowledging our responsibility  
for the dimming of our Creator's world.  
This year, these times, have left many without  
hope, peace, joy, or love,  
and we human beings are a part of creating the light-lessness.

*Maren Tirabassi*

*Welcome*



# Prayer

One: Gentle God, all around us are the sights and sounds of Christmas:  
the laughter of parties, the songs of carolers,  
the shouts of children in playgrounds, the music in every store.  
But deep within us we carry our pain,  
our grief dwells with us every hour,  
loneliness is a shawl we drape over our shoulders on empty nights.

***All: So, in this time when every night stretches into eternity,  
we come to you, bringing our gifts:  
not gold, frankincense, and myrrh,  
but the grief of a closet filled with memories,  
the loss which won't heal,  
and bitterness like old coffee.***

One: We have come from different backgrounds,  
from different families,  
from other faith traditions.  
But we have all lived in the far country of despair,  
wandered the land of shame,  
built our lives in neighborhoods peopled by empty dreams.

***All: We have stood on the side of every room we have gone into,  
hoping against hope that someone would ask us to dance,  
but the wall is our only friend.***

One: In a season when so many people don't have enough hours in a day  
to get their lists checked off, their cards mailed,  
their presents wrapped, we have all the time in the world:

**All: to remember the loss that stole the joy of the season;  
to grieve over a job, a dream, a loved one gone,  
and grieve, too, what we long for;  
to anguish over human violence and indifference  
and lament the devastation of Creation itself;  
to sit in the shadows of our homes, too weary to turn on the lights;  
to wander the streets by bright by colorful lights  
but not by the Light of the world.**

One: Our fear of the future, our remembrance of the past;  
our pain which is difficult to bear and harder to release;  
our emptiness which cannot be filled with platitudes;  
our hands which cannot hold the ones we wish to embrace:  
all make this a season of long nights.

**All: So, be with us in our loneliness,  
in our longing,  
in our loss,  
in our lives.**

*adapted from prayers written by Thom Shuman*



# Psalm 27

The Holy One is my light and my salvation;  
whom shall I fear?  
The Holy One is the stronghold of my life;  
of what shall I be afraid?  
When evildoers assail me  
to devour my flesh—  
my adversaries and foes—  
they shall stumble and fall.  
Though an army encamp against me,  
my heart shall not fear;  
though war may rise up around me,  
yet I will be confident.  
One thing I ask of God,  
that will I seek after:  
to live in the house of the Holy One  
all the days of my life,  
to behold the beauty of the Most High,  
and to inquire in the temple.  
For you will hide me in your shelter  
in the day of trouble;  
you will conceal me under the cover of your tent;  
you will set me high on a rock.  
I believe that I shall witness the goodness of God  
in the land of the living.  
Wait for the Lord;  
be strong, and let your heart take courage;  
wait for the Lord!

## Home

Ola Gjeilo



# Confession

One: God, be with us now,  
as we come to you.  
Settle us  
into the disquiet of our lives  
that we might open  
our spirits to your light.



**All:** O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, and ran-som cap-tive Is - ra - el,



that mourns in lone-ly ex - ile here, un - til the Son of God ap - pears.

One: You called us to love,  
commanded us to it;  
your highest priority.  
We've grown impatient,  
half-hearted,  
dispassionate.  
Our indifference extinguishes the light of love.

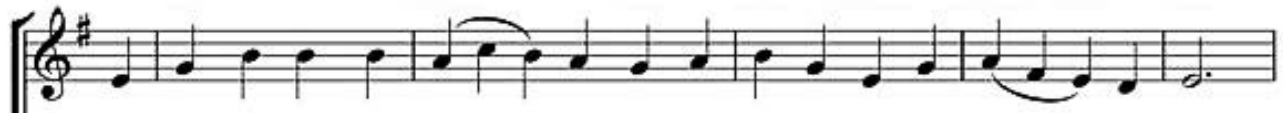


**All:** O come, thou Day-spring, come and cheer our spi - rits by thine ad - vent here;



dis - perse the gloo-my clouds of night and death's dark sha-dows put to flight.

One: You created an abundant world,  
rivers of clean water which we pollute,  
skies of brilliant color which we poison.  
We smother our laughter,  
domesticate our playgrounds,  
and restrain our adventures.  
Our despair extinguishes the light of joy.



*All: O come, De - sire of na - tions, bind all peo - ples in one heart and mind;*



*bid en - vy, strife, and quar - rels cease; fill the whole world with hea - ven's peace.*

One: We were once strangers without a home,  
undefended and alone.  
It terrifies us to even think of it,  
so we suit up for battle  
against even the smallest threat.  
We are suspicious and miserly.  
Our fear extinguishes the light of peace.



*All: O come, thou Wis - dom from - on high, and ord - er all things far and nigh;*



*to us the path of know - ledge show, and cause us in her ways to go.*

One: You come, and come, and come  
suffusing our lives with promise,  
leading, gathering your fold together.  
We recoil and retreat,  
hardening ourselves against disappointment,  
Yet still, the light of hope burns.

*There is a light here in the dark,  
and the darkness shall not overcome it.*

# Grace

One: Come Emmanuel,  
Come Sunrise,  
Come Desire of our hearts,  
Come Wisdom.  
The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness has not overcome it.



**All:** *Re-joice! Re-joice! Em-man - u - el shall come to thee, O Is - ra - el.*

Two: I refuse to live in a world without hope.  
I will not give up.  
The candle of hope is not ours to extinguish;  
it was not we who first lit it.  
I will lift up this light for those in need,  
and let the church to do the same for me.



**All:** *Re-joice! Re-joice! Em-man - u - el shall come to thee, O Is - ra - el.*



Three: I refuse to live in a world where my neighbor is my enemy  
and every new thing is a danger.  
I will not give in to fear.  
I relight the candle of peace.  
I will trust the goodness that dwells in people's hearts.



**All:** Re-joice! Re-joice! Em-man - u-el shall come to thee, O Is - ra-el.

Four: I refuse to live in a world without joy.  
I will not despair.  
I relight the candle of joy.  
I will search for beautiful music, the fragrance of pine branches,  
for the strength of mountains, and the serenity of the stars.



**All:** Re-joice! Re-joice! Em-man - u-el shall come to thee, O Is - ra-el.

Five: I refuse to live in a world without love.  
I will not succumb to indifference.  
I rekindle the candle of love.  
I will remember that every person is a beloved child of God.  
And I am too.



**All:** Re-joice! Re-joice! Em-man - u-el shall come to thee, O Is - ra-el.

One: God of power and presence,  
in your holiness, you could have remained apart from us,  
but in your love, you came to us to be one of us in Jesus.  
When we struggle in despair's poverty,  
Jesus enriches us with your grace.  
When we are weakened by fear,  
Christ strengthens us with your hope.  
When we think our lives are empty,  
he fills us with everything we need.

One: When death thought it had lulled him to sleep,  
he kept alert, waiting  
for your resurrection love  
to gather him up  
and bring him to new life.

**All: *With those who are always alert,  
and with those who are drowsy from waiting,  
we remember that we are your people.***

One: You pour out your Spirit upon us;  
you come to earth in Jesus  
that we might find you in broken bread,

**All: *which gives us the strength  
to be your hope to those in sadness,  
to be your light to those in shadows,  
to be your justice to those oppressed.***

One: God, your life was poured out for us in Jesus,  
and you returned as our Messiah  
that we might find your grace in the cup,

**All: *which gives us the will  
to be your healing for the broken,  
to be your family for the lonely,  
to be your love for those who are ignored.***

One: When all time is ended,  
gather us with our kith and kin,  
from every time and every place  
around the table you have prepared for us,  
as we sing our joyful praises to you,  
God in Community, Holy in One. Amen.

*adapted from prayers written by Thom Shuman*

# *In the bleak midwinter*

In the bleak mid - win - ter,      Fros - ty wind made moan,  
God, heav'n can - not hold him,      Nor earth sus - tain;

Earth stood hard as i - ron,      Wa - ter like a stone;  
Heav'n and earth shall flee away      When he comes to reign;

Snow had fall - en, snow on snow,      Snow on snow,  
In the bleak mid - win - ter      A sta - ble place suff - iced      The

In the bleak mid - win - ter,      Long a - go.  
Lord God Al - migh - ty,      Je - sus Christ.

# Benediction

One: Sojourner Truth said,  
"I will not allow my life's light  
to be determined by the darkness around me."  
This is the longest night of the year  
and the first day of a new season.  
There is a light here in the dark,  
and the darkness shall not overcome it.  
Go into the night illuminated.  
Go into the night renewed.  
Go by the light of God's love.  
Amen.

# Silent Night

Ola Gjeilo



# Amen