

A Place for Quiet Hope: Our Longest Night Service, December 21, 5 pm

For many, Christmas is a season of lights, laughter, and joy. But for others, this time of year can feel heavy. Grief has its own calendar, and it doesn't take a holiday break. Worry, loneliness, or exhaustion don't simply disappear because the world around us seems determined to be merry. And this year, especially, so many are carrying burdens—grief after the death of a loved one, the ache of being far from family, strained relationships, financial struggles, illness, anxiety, political unrest, or the deep uncertainty facing so many in our community and world.

If this describes you—or someone you love—then our **Longest Night Service** (sometimes called *Blue Christmas*) is a place made especially for you. This quiet, reflective worship service creates space for honesty, healing, and hope. It reminds us that it is *holy* to stop pretending to be joyful when joy feels far away. It reminds us that God sees us, just as we are, and meets us in our need.

The heart of this service is the promise spoken in Isaiah 61, a passage Jesus claimed as his mission:

- to bring good news to the poor,
- to heal the brokenhearted,
- to proclaim liberty for the captives,
- to free those who feel imprisoned by circumstance or sorrow,
- to comfort all who mourn,
- and to exchange despair for beauty and hope.

This is what Jesus came to do. This is who Jesus came *for*.

But the Longest Night Service is not only for those who are hurting. It is also for the **whole church**, because we are called to be the body of Christ for one another. In seasons when some cannot pray, the community prays on their behalf. When some feel too weary to hope, the community holds hope for them. When some feel alone in their grief, the community surrounds them with compassion, courage, and care.

Your presence matters—whether you come seeking comfort or offering it.

Your prayers matter—whether whispered through tears or spoken in solidarity.

Your attendance is a powerful reminder that no one in our congregation walks through darkness by themselves.

On the longest night of the year, we gather to acknowledge the shadows we live with and to welcome the Light that will not be overcome. If this season is difficult for you, please come. If you love someone who is struggling, bring them. If you are able to be a source of strength for others, your presence will be a gift.

Let us come together—quietly, gently, tenderly—trusting that Christ meets us in the dark and leads us toward hope.

You are invited. You are needed. You are not alone.