



**The Longest Night
A Gathering on the Winter Solstice**

Wednesday, December 20, 2017

**Orchard Valley United Church
130 Cornwallis Ave, New Minas NS
(902) 681-0366**

THE LONGEST NIGHT

Welcome

Hymn: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

VU #1

Words of Welcome:

One: Many in this season aren't ready to sing "Joy to the World." Whether this is the first Christmas without someone we love, or we are still hurting from loss or suffering for a long time, we gather this evening to worship God in the midst of mourning. We gather to shed tears if they come, to hold hands, and to join our voices with one another and our forebears in the faith who still cry out, "How long?" And so we pray:

All: Come, Holy Spirit. Comfort us and all who mourn this night. Give us strength to grieve as we must. Help us receive your healing in the midst of our pain, and find new order after the chaos of loss; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Call to Worship:

One: The journey is long and the road is shadowed; what shall we do?

All: We shall light a candle to fight back the shadows. We shall not live in fear of where the road will take us.

One: The road is uncertain and the air so cold; what shall we do?

All: We shall light a candle to fight back the cold. We shall not live in fear of where the path will guide us.

One: The path is unfamiliar and fear of the unknown blocks our way home; what shall we do?

All: We shall light a candle to illumine this new path. We shall not live in fear of finding home by another way.

One: One candle? Will that be enough? For the journey is long, the road uncertain, and the night is so desperately cold.

All: It will be a start. And as one flame dances, we will rejoice, for we are children of the light, we are followers of the Christ, and we know that one candle is just the beginning.

Opening Prayer: (All)

Creator God, we call on you in the heat and in the cold, in the sun and in the sleet, in our greatest joys and our deepest despairs. We call on you, the essence of wind and waters, flowers and grasses. Be holy light, flame, and fire in us. Be constant in life and in death. Be in our standing and sitting. Be in our waking and sleeping. In the wilderness, be manna. In the desert, water. In the shadows, light. Holy Spirit, ever-permeate our heights and depths with your eternal love. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Hymn: "Like a Rock" MV #92

Scripture: Isaiah 40:1-5, 21-31; John 1:1-14

**Solo: "Breath of Heaven"
(words and music by Amy Grant)**

Invitation to Walk the Labyrinth

Hymn: "Silent Night, Holy Night" VU #67

Lighting of the First Advent Candle:

God of Advent Hope, we gather here in this place, open to the ways that you touch our lives, aware of the moments that you help us on our journey, and thankful for the times that you show

us the path to take as your people. Give us reason to be clear about our faith, and shine your light of hope and love upon us, we pray in Jesus' name. In silence, may we offer prayers that indicate our own needs this day, and into the future.

(Silent confession)

Words of Assurance:

One: Even within the deepening shadows of this season, the light of God abounds. We are a pilgrim people; we set out on journeys that lead to new insights and reveal new experiences, knowing that God will be with us wherever we go.

All: Let us not be discouraged. Let us be open to the light. Let us give thanks to God, now and always. Amen.

Lighting of the Second Advent Candle:

Holy One, in the journey of life, you are with us. Today we seek a special reminder of your presence. Today we look for ways to assist and serve others. May those we meet feel that the light of God surrounds them, and may the light of God inspire all that we do each new day. Hear us, God, as we offer our personal prayers to you in the silence of this moment.

(Silent confession)

Words of Assurance:

One: Even within the deepening shadows of this season, the light of God abounds. God hears us. God hears as we share our dreams, our hopes, and our needs. God discerns our thoughts from afar, and we are thankful.

All: Let us not be discouraged. Let us embrace courage and strength for the journey. Let us give thanks to God, now and always. Amen.

Lighting of the Third Advent Candle:

Holy Presence, you have led us to this moment in time, reassuring us when we face uncertainty, prodding us into action when we become hesitant and fearful, and comforting us when we are in the midst of surprising changes, both great and small. Be with us as we continue our journey through Advent. May we be aware of the ways in which faith is a constant journey, a pathway on which we seek new meaning and new opportunities to experience God. Hear us, God, as we offer our personal prayers at this time.

(Silent confession)

Words of Assurance:

One: Even within the deepening shadows of this season, the light of God abounds. We are a pilgrim people; we set out on journeys that lead to new insights and reveal new experiences, knowing that God will be with us wherever we go.

All: **Let us not be discouraged. Let us be open to the light. Let us give thanks to God, now and always. Amen.**

Lighting of the Fourth Advent Candle:

We are open to your light, God, in the journey of life. We are aware that the shadows do not hold the final answer, that despair is not the final emotion, and that disappointment is not the final destination when we open ourselves to your light, to your promise, and to your love. Be near to us as we approach the birth of the holy Christ child, and be reborn in our hearts this day, we pray.

(Silent confession)

Words of Assurance:

One: Even within the deepening shadows of this season, the light of God abounds. Let us be eager to sing “Gloria” and to shout “Amen” as we give thanks for the birth of the Bethlehem baby anticipated so long ago and still today. Through the birth of Jesus, God reminded us that we are never lost or abandoned, for God is with us every step of the way.

All: **Let us not be discouraged. Let us embrace courage and strength for the journey. Let us give thanks to God, now and always. Amen.**

Prayer Candles

(You are invited to light a candle for your prayer.)

The Prayer That Jesus Taught (The Lord’s Prayer)

Hymn: “It Came Upon the Midnight Clear”

VU #44

Closing Words: (All)

We return to the world from which we came: a world of pain, a world of promise; the world which God so loved that the Bethlehem baby was born. May we listen to the voice of the angel who says, “Fear not.” May we be filled with the Good News of God, through the child of Mary and Joseph, God’s gift of new life for all. Amen.

Blessing and Dismissal:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who knows our pain and struggle, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, and the strength of the Holy Spirit, be with you this night and always. Amen.

*Some material from this service has been adapted from
Gathering Magazine, A/C/E 2017/18 (Year B).*

A Holy Path: Walking the Labyrinth

Labyrinths are powerful ancient symbols and tools found all over the world. They have been used at various times to baffle enemies, protect treasure and secrets, and as symbolic paths to insight and salvation. In Greek mythology, Theseus travelled through a labyrinth to reach the monster Minotaur. Roman artwork frequently depicted labyrinths as walled cities. In the Middle Ages, many Christians considered labyrinths as allegorical representatives of the soul's progress from earth to heaven, or as analogies for pilgrimages to the Holy Land.

Today, labyrinths are being used by people in several different faith traditions. A resurgence in interest in the labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral, which dates from about 1220, has formed the seeds of labyrinth meditation worldwide as copies of the Chartres labyrinth have been painted on canvas and laid in stonework and used in churches, retreat centres, hospitals, and public spaces.

A labyrinth is a unicursal – that is, one-way – path. It has no dead ends or trick entrances or exits. To walk a labyrinth is to walk the only path possible, following its complex moves, bends and turns, moving from the outside into the heart and back out again. Some researchers believe that the continuous pattern of 180-degree turns requires a concomitant shift in awareness from the left brain to the right brain, which is why many people find walking the labyrinth to be calming. Dr Lauren Artress writes:

Walking the labyrinth does not demand a great amount of concentration in order to benefit from the experience. The sheer act of walking a complicated path – which discharges energy – begins to focus the mind. A quiet mind does not happen automatically. But the labyrinth experience sensitizes us, educates us, and helps us distinguish superficial extraneous thoughts from the “thought” that comes from our soul level and that each of us longs to hear. Many of us are discovering that this is much easier to do when our whole body is moving – when we are walking.

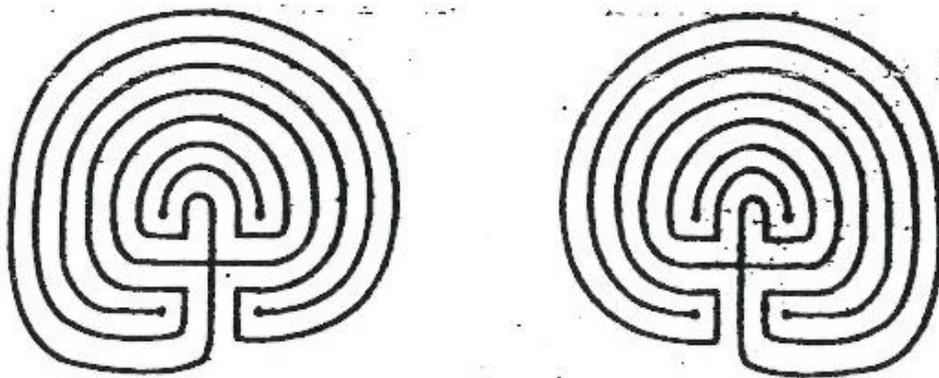
(Walking a Sacred Path, Riverhead Books, 1995, p. 71)

There is no set way to experience the labyrinth. Many people find it helpful to try to clear their minds before entering a labyrinth, and then to focus on a question. Others simply try to be open to whatever may come to them in the experience of walking. Walkers frequently report that they experience a sense of release in walking. Following the turning path encourages a shift in energy and attention that often brings new, or deeper, insights.

Labyrinth walking can help anyone who is going through a time of transition or decision-making. Portable labyrinths are often used in workshops for those who feel a need to make a change in their spiritual practice as well as for bereaved people, and those who are discerning vocations, or anticipating major, life-changing events.



Chartres-type labyrinth - 7 circuit



Classical labyrinth