

# *From Darkness to Light*

The Solemn Office of Compline  
*for Advent*

Tuesday, December 19, 2021  
6:00 p.m. *in the Chapel*



## About the Service

The office of Compline is the final service of the day within the liturgical tradition of canonical hours. Also called “Night Prayer,” this ancient liturgy dates back to the sixth century when it was incorporated by St. Benedict in his *Rule*. Though now it is typically observed in monastic communities, this service offers us a solemn and contemplative space, with an special emphasis on spiritual peace.

Advent, much like a “Winter’s Lent”, along with Lent, Easter, and Christmas, is the season that most speaks to our contemporary human condition. It is a season that has long been symbolized by the lighting of the candles of an Advent wreath representing the four weeks of the Advent season and culminating in the lighting of the fifth principal candle at Christmas. No doubt this tradition reaches back into our Jewish past and the Feast of Lights at Hanukkah, and has been popular within Christian celebrations particularly in Germany and Scandinavian countries down the centuries. Today the Advent wreath has become a universal symbol, to be found in many households as well as in churches.

The lighting of a candle reminds us that though we live in a dark world at the heart of the Christian Gospel is a message of hope. Flickering and fragile though the light of a candle may be yet the flame of such a candle lights up a dark room. It represents that Light of the World which illuminates our world and our lives with its transforming radiance which guides us into all truth. It is in the belief that God is with us even in the darkness — as the story of Jesus will reveal as we travel the journey of his life from Advent to Pentecost — that many churches begin this Advent Season by lighting a single large candle in a dark church at the start of an Advent Procession. The candle recalls the hope incarnated in Jesus that shines in our dark world, as I have just described. And the procession reminds us that Christians are a pilgrim people, ever on the move for, as the Epistle to the Hebrews says: “We have here no abiding city but we seek one to come” (Hebrews 13.14).

Of course, Christmas awaits us at the end of this four-week season, and we will then be back in our comfort zone: back with the Baby and hovering angels, the ox and the ass, the shepherds and their sheep, and the incense and the gold (let’s forget myrrh for a moment with its darker implications!) Christmas, profound festival though it is, as we celebrate the Word made flesh and dwelling among us, often triggers our sentimentality and a superficial optimism. We forget that, much as we enjoy Christmas, often to excess, many in our world live without the basic necessities we take for granted, and for whom life is often ‘nasty, brutish and short’. It was among them that Jesus was born, and for them He died. Just as we cannot celebrate Easter without plumbing the depths, as Jesus did, of Good Friday, so we cannot celebrate Christmas without the sobering preparation of Advent.

Advent is rich in music and verse, including some of the finest poetry in Scripture, dominated by the prophecies of Isaiah and the heroic stories of John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary. For many of us, Advent's rich texture is exemplified in the Advent hymns with their declamatory message and their thunderous melodies. But for all its plangent beauty Advent begins in darkness and silence, reminding us of the real world beyond the shrine, where God Himself was content — indeed determined — to pitch His tent.

As well as preparing for Christmas, Advent has traditionally focused on more somber themes as well, reminding us not only of the first coming of Jesus, but also of His second coming when as the Creed rehearses 'He will come again in glory to judge both the living and the dead'. This is a theme picked up in Thomas Cranmer's peerless Advent Collect where he talks of Jesus who 'comes at the last day in His glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead'. Some of our Advent hymns like 'Lo, He comes with clouds descending' focus on the Four Last Things — death, judgment heaven, and hell — adding a penitential note to our Alleluias. Though not much preached about these days, those traditional Advent themes do concentrate on the ultimate things that confront us as human beings, and we need such opportunities as the Advent season provides to reflect on them. These themes reveal us — and indeed the whole of humanity — as we truly are. Not a pleasant sight, but extraordinary though it may seem, it is in us, — frail, wayward, prodigal humanity that we are — that God sees Himself reflected and longs to get His own back — that is to bring us back home. That is why God, in Jesus, gave Himself (emptied Himself and was obedient even unto death is how St. Paul puts it) so that all who believe should not perish but have eternal life.

Our world is dark — despite our human ingenuity and inventiveness — and our lives are dark as well, but year by year we light a candle in a dark room, as a sacramental affirmation that God has already lit a candle in our dark world. That light of the world has a name – His name is Jesus. 'That light was the true light that enlightens everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never overcome it'. We will hear those words from St. John's Gospel again on Christmas Eve.

That is the Christian Good News, that though our world is dark, a light shines. Its meaning is this: God loves us and He will never leave us. That conviction gives hope to our world and to each one of us. That is the message of Advent.

Thanks be to God!

# The Order of Worship

## SILENT PRAYER of PREPARATION for WORSHIP

*I thank You, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body, my soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.*

WELCOME            The Reverend Dr. Mark Conforti, *Senior Pastor*  
The Lord be with you.  
And also with you.

INTROIT                    Joshua Starnes, *Director of Music Ministry*  
*Veni Emmanuel*

*Words: VI Century Latin*  
*Music: XV Century French plainchant*

*As the bourdon bell is tolled, all stand and face the rear of the Nave.*

## ✠ PROCESSION of THE LIGHT

*From the rear of the Nave:*

In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord;  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.  
(Isaiah 40.3)

Our King and Savior draws near:  
O come, let us adore Him.

*From the center of the Nave:*

Therefore, stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. (Mark 13.35-36)

Surely the Lord is coming soon.

*Amen.* Come, Lord Jesus!

*From the front of the Nave:*

The LORD is our light and our salvation; whom shall we fear? The LORD is the strength of our life; of whom shall we be afraid? (Psalm 27.1)

Christ comforts us in all our sorrow,  
and changes us from weakness to strength;  
from mourning to glad dancing;  
from sorrow to joy;  
from fear to faith;  
from darkness to light.

✦ HYMN of LIGHT: NO. 206 *(sung by all)*

HOUSTON

*I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light*

*The altar retable candles are lit as we sing together.*

✦ BLESSING of THE LIGHT

Blessed are You, LORD God, Creator of day and night:  
to You be praise and glory forever.

As darkness falls You renew Your promise  
to reveal among us the Light of Your Presence.

By the light of Jesus Christ, Your Living Word,  
dispel the darkness of our hearts  
that we may walk as children of light  
and sing Your praises throughout all the world.

*Amen.*

✠ CALL to WORSHIP (*responsively*)

The Lord Almighty grant us a peaceful night  
and a perfect end.

*Amen.*

Our help is in the Name of the LORD;

The Maker of heaven and earth. (Psalm 124.8)

CONFESSIO*N* *and* FORGIVENESS

Let us humbly confess our sins to Almighty God and one  
another:

*Silence is kept for personal reflection and private confession.*

Almighty and Most merciful God,  
We confess to You,  
to one another,  
and to the whole company of heaven,  
that we are in bondage to sin  
and cannot free ourselves.

We have sinned against You,  
through our own fault,  
in thought, word, and deed;  
by what we have done,  
and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved You with our whole heart;  
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.

For the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ,  
have mercy on us.

Forgive us, renew us, and lead us,  
so that by the power of Your Holy Spirit,  
delight in Your will,  
and walk in Your ways,  
to the glory of Your Holy Name.

*Amen.*

May Almighty God grant us forgiveness of all our sins,  
and the grace and comfort of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

- <sup>1</sup> Whoever dwells under the defense of the Most High  
shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.
- <sup>2</sup> I will say unto the LORD, "You are my refuge and my  
stronghold,  
my God in whom I will trust."
- <sup>3</sup> For he shall deliver you from the snare of the hunter  
and from the deadly pestilence.
- <sup>4</sup> He shall defend you under his wings, and you shall be  
safe under his feathers;  
his faithfulness and truth shall be your shield  
and buckler.
- <sup>5</sup> You shall not be afraid of any terror by night,  
nor of the arrow that flies by day,
- <sup>6</sup> Of the pestilence that walks in darkness,  
nor of the sickness that destroys at noonday.
- <sup>7</sup> A thousand shall fall beside you, and ten thousand at  
your right hand,  
but it shall not come near you.
- <sup>8</sup> Indeed, with your eyes you shall behold  
and see the reward of the ungodly.
- <sup>9</sup> Because you have said, "The LORD is my refuge,"  
and have made the Most High your stronghold,
- <sup>10</sup> There shall no evil happen to you,  
neither shall any plague come near your  
dwelling.
- <sup>11</sup> For he shall give his angels charge over you,  
to keep you in all your ways.
- <sup>12</sup> They shall bear you in their hands,  
that you hurt not your foot against a stone.

<sup>13</sup>You shall tread upon the lion and adder;  
the young lion and the serpent you shall trample  
under your feet.

<sup>14</sup>“Because he has set his love upon me, therefore I will  
deliver him;  
I will lift him up, because he has known my  
Name.

<sup>15</sup>He shall call upon me, and I will hear him;  
and bring him honor.

<sup>16</sup>With long life I will satisfy him,  
and show him my salvation.”

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Spirit;

As it was in the beginning, is now,  
and ever shall be: world without end. *Amen.*

✦ LESSON

Revelation 21.1-5 (*Bible, NT: p. 259*)

MEDITATION

✦ AFFIRMATION of OUR FAITH (*in unison*)

*The Nicene Creed*

We believe in one God,  
the Father, the Almighty,  
Maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made,  
of one Being with the Father;  
through Him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation  
He came down from heaven,  
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and  
the Virgin Mary and became truly human.  
For our sake He was crucified  
under Pontius Pilate;  
He suffered death and was buried.  
On the third day He rose again  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
He ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory  
to judge the living and the dead,  
and His kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the Lord, the Giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father [and the Son,]  
who with the Father and the Son  
is worshipped and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.  
We believe in the one holy catholic\* [*\*universal*]  
and apostolic Church.  
We acknowledge one baptism  
for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. *Amen.*

✠ HYMN of RESPONSE: NO. 211 (*sung by all*)

VENI EMMANUEL

*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*

*The antiphons are read responsively, preceding each corresponding stanza.*

CALL to PRAYER (*responsively*)

O God, make speed to save us;  
O LORD, make haste to help us.

Into Your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit;  
For You have redeemed me, O LORD,  
O God of truth.

Keep me, O LORD, as the apple of Your eye;  
Hide me under the shadow of Your wings.

Holy God,  
Holy and Mighty,  
Holy and Immortal,  
Have mercy upon us.

O LORD, hear our prayer;  
And let our cry come to You.

PRAYERS *of* THE PEOPLE

*Following each petition:*

...Coming LORD, in Your mercy:  
hear our prayer...

THE GREAT THANKSGIVING (*responsively*)

The Lord be with you.  
And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.  
We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.  
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

...we praise Your Name and join their unending hymn:  
Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of Your glory.  
*Hosanna* in the highest!  
Blessed is he who comes in the Name of the  
Lord. *Hosanna* in the highest!

...as we proclaim the mystery of faith:

Christ has died;  
Christ is risen;  
Christ will come again!

...all honor and glory is Yours, Almighty Father,  
now and forever.

*AMEN!*

THE LORD'S PRAYER (*in unison*)

*from Matthew 6.9b-13*

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be Thy Name.  
Thy Kingdom come,  
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
[For Thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory, forever. *Amen.*]

INVITATION *to* THE LORD'S TABLE *and* SHARING *of* THE LORD'S SUPPER

*You are invited to come forward to receive the elements via intinction  
(dipping the bread into the chalice of grape juice.)  
After receiving Communion, you may light a candle  
before returning to your seat.*

The body of Christ, given for you. *Amen.*  
The blood of Christ, shed for you. *Amen.*

✠ POST-COMMUNION HYMN: No. 226 (*sung by all*)

MORNING SONG

*My Master, See, the Time Has Come*

*(Nunc Dimittis: Canticle of Simeon – from Luke 2.29-32)*

✠ BENECTION

*You may bow your head and extend your hands to receive the blessing.*

May Almighty God, by whose Providence our Savior Christ came amongst us in great humility, sanctify us with the light of His blessing and set us free from all sin. *Amen.*

May He whose Second Coming in power and great glory we await, make us steadfast in faith, joyful in hope, and constant in love. *Amen.*

May we, who rejoice in the first Advent of our Redeemer, at His Second Advent be rewarded with unending life. *Amen.*

And may the Almighty and merciful LORD: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless us and keep us, this night and forevermore. *Amen.*

✠ DISMISSAL

Guide us waking, O LORD, and guard us sleeping;  
that awake we may watch with Christ,  
and asleep we may rest in peace.

Let us go forth in the peace of Christ  
to love and bless the LORD.  
Thanks be to God!

*You may remain for quiet prayer before departing in silence.*

*Those Serving in Worship:*

Larry Cordts, Brenda Loflin, Ronnie Rhinehart,  
Sandy Yon, and Tony Yon.

*Prayer & Care*

If you have a pastoral care need or a prayer request, please share that need through our website at: [fumcsalisbury.org/prayer](http://fumcsalisbury.org/prayer), or contact Pastor Mark. All requests are confidential. Those in need of pastoral counseling may contact Garry Cook, our Counseling Center Pastoral Counselor, by phone at: 704.375.5354, x. 405, or by email at: [gcook@scgnc.org](mailto:gcook@scgnc.org). For more information, please visit: [fumcsalisbury.org/counseling-center](http://fumcsalisbury.org/counseling-center).