St. Aidan's Episcopal Church

December 21, 2025 2 P.M.

Prelude

Welcome

After the welcome, the first of seven Advent candles is lit.

Opening Prayer

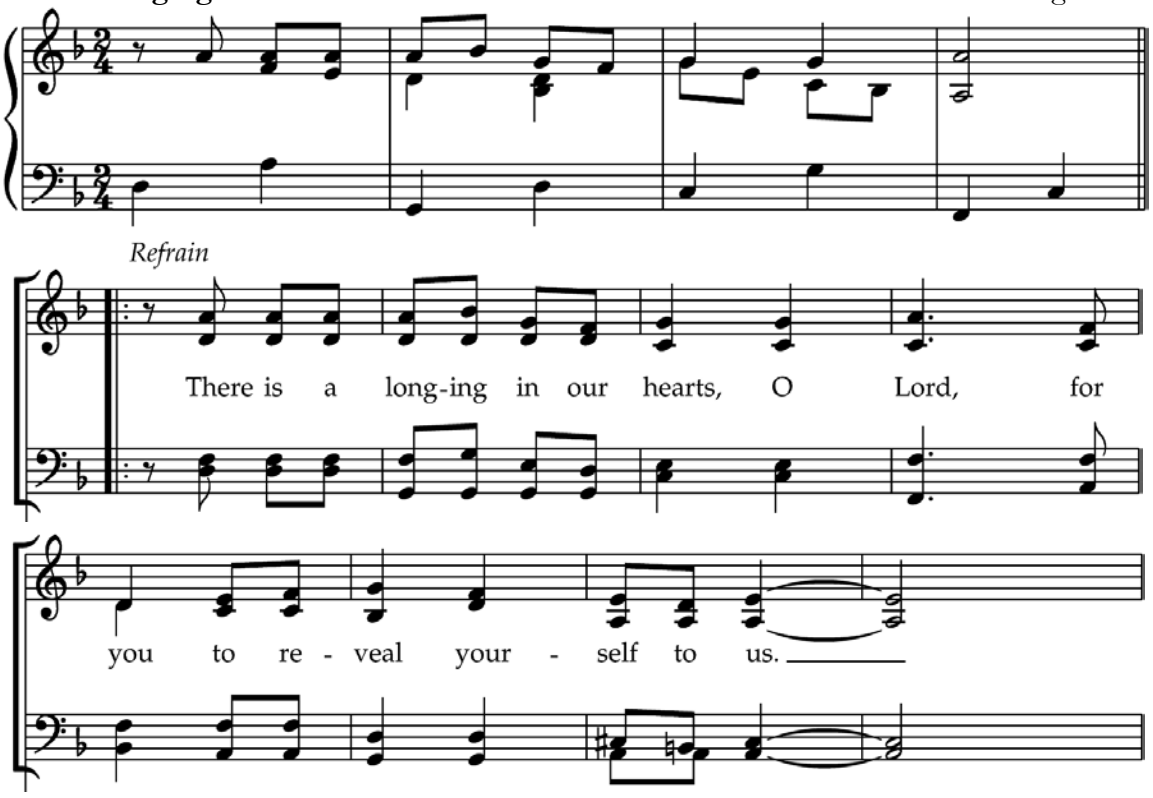
Presider Light and peace in Jesus Christ our Savior.
People ***Thanks be to God.***

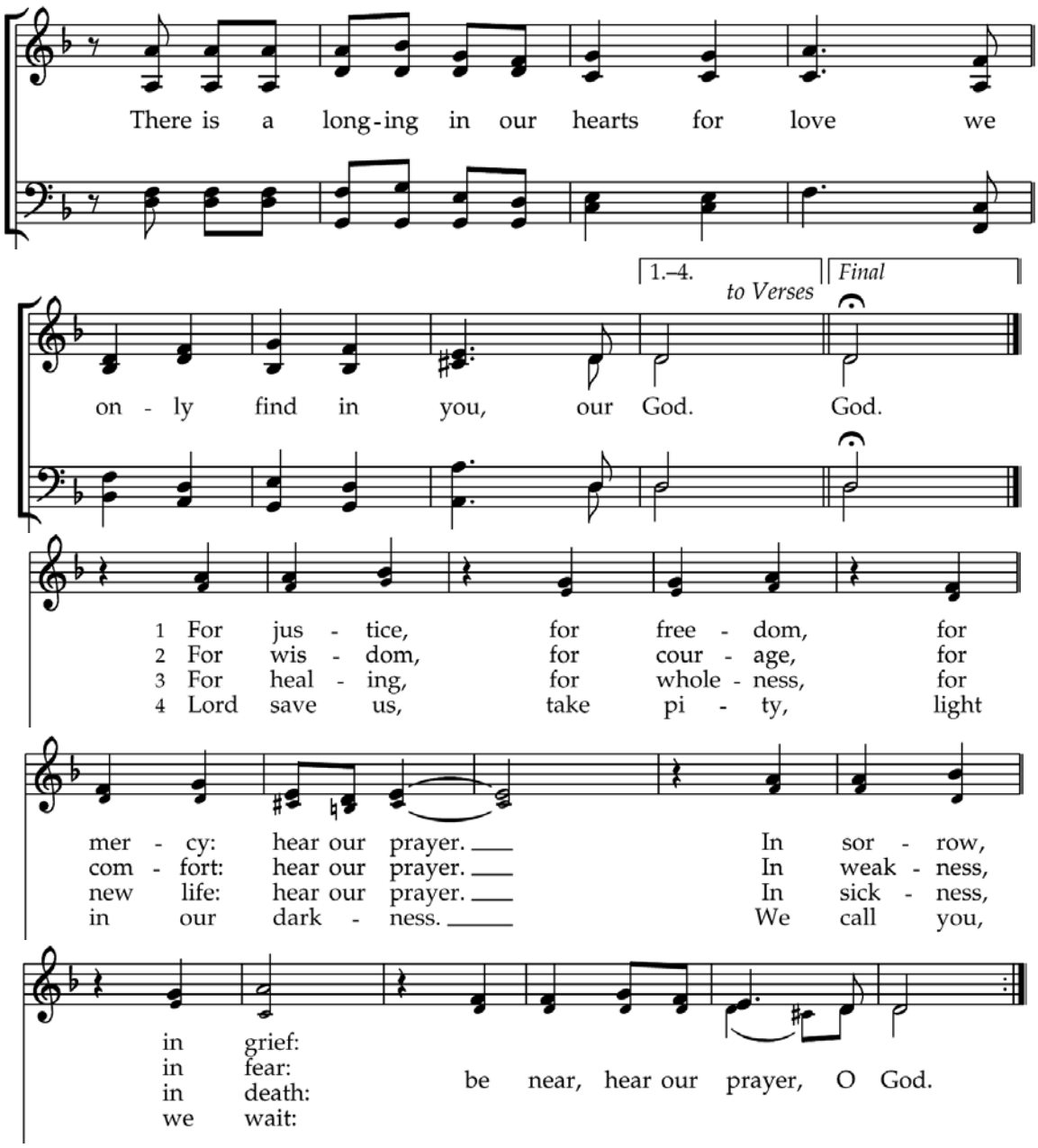
Presider
If I say, surely the darkness will cover me and the light around me turn to night, shadows are not dark to you, O God; the night is as bright as the day; darkness and light to you are both alike. – Psalm 139:10-11

Presider God be with you.
People ***And also with you.***
Presider Let us pray.
God of compassion and consolation, in this season of Advent waiting as Christmas approaches, we lift up before you the sorrows and longings of our hearts. We hold these things in your presence as we gather in prayer, in song, in silence, in community. Be near, hear our prayer, O God.

As we sing, the second Advent candle is lit.

There Is a Longing in Our Hearts *All Creation Sings #1078*





Reading

Lector A reading from Esther DeWaal.

I can read the gospels as an account of a God of healing at work amidst the pain and suffering of the world. Certainly they make it plain that Christ walked in constant awareness of the pain of the world, as well as of its beauty and potential. He never minimized the problems of suffering and of evil. He never offered an explanation which would trivialize human anguish. But by taking human suffering seriously he took human dignity seriously. This comes over most poignantly in St. Matthew's Gospel (9:35-6):

Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching and preaching… and healing… every infirmity. When he saw the crowds he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

….. The shepherd is above all the one who seeks, who goes after the stray, who searches for the lost and who brings them back to the fold. There is here something which we all recognize. For not only are we seeking God. God is seeking us.

To seek God
means first of all
to let yourself be found by God.
God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
God is the God of Jesus Christ.
God is your God
not because God is yours
but because you are God's.
To choose God
is to realize that you are known and loved
in a way surpassing anything you can imagine
long before anyone had thought of you or spoken your name.

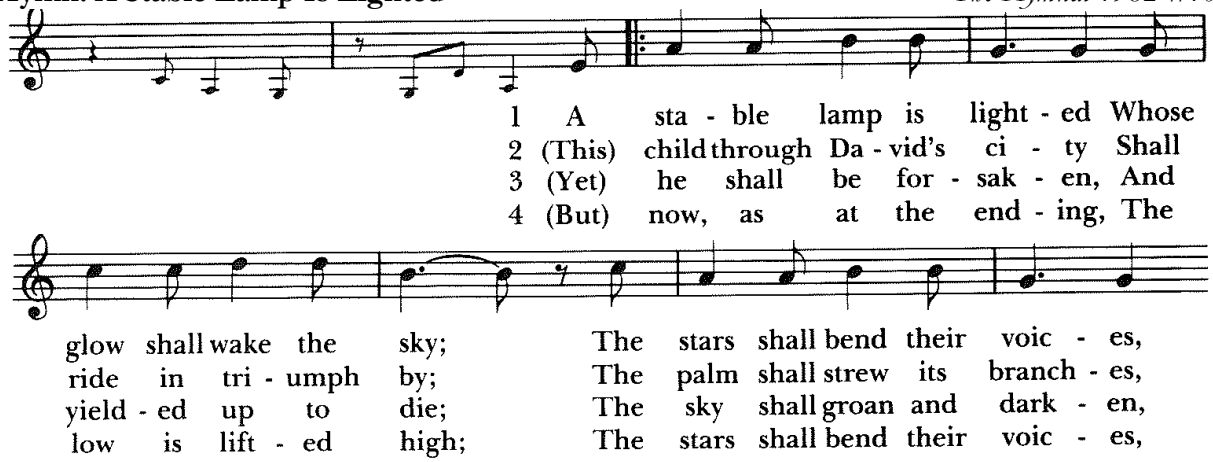
Lector Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people.
People ***Thanks be to God.***

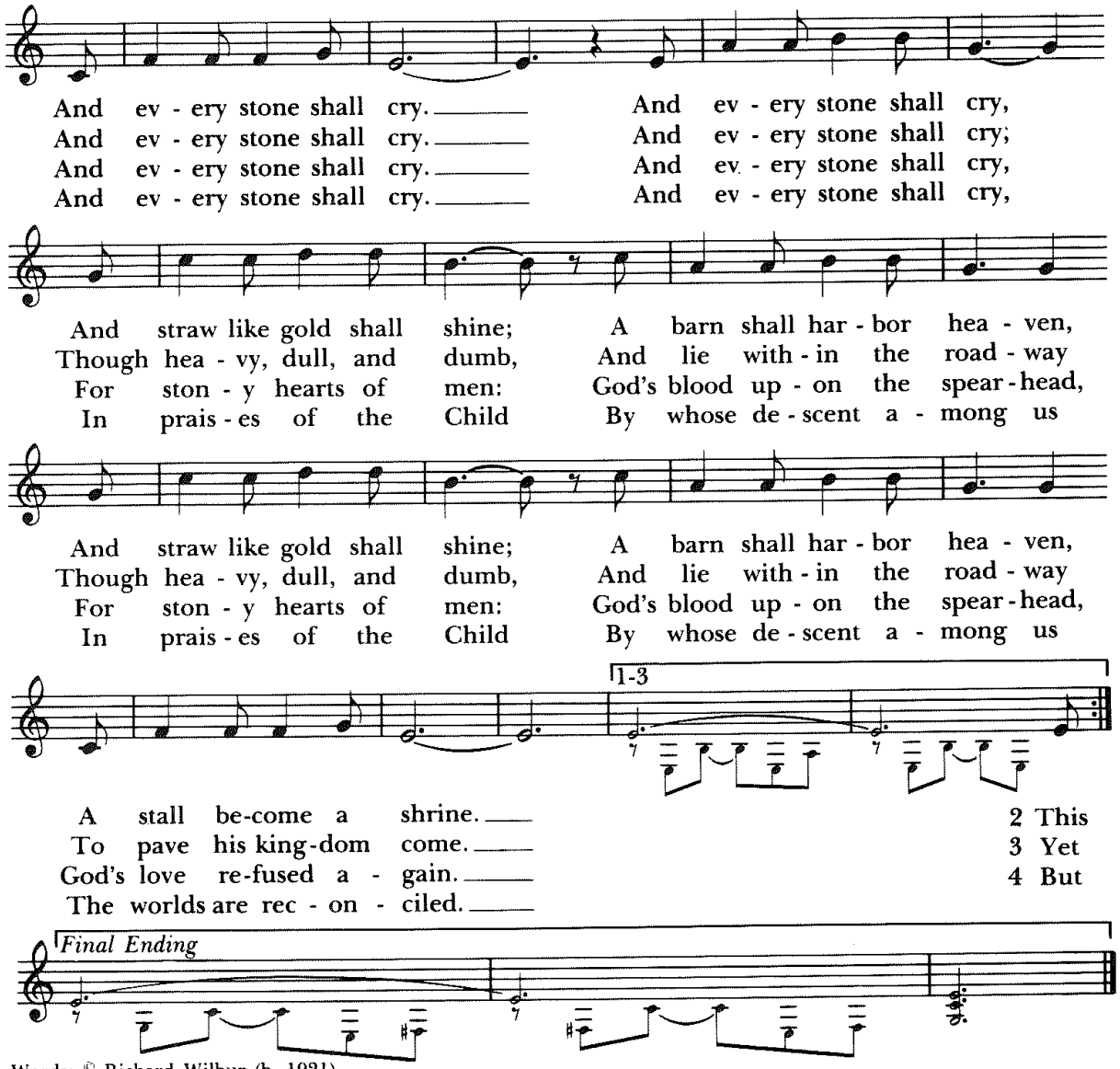
Reflection *The Rev'd Mark Kuga Henderson*

Silence

We will sit in silence after the reflection. At the close of the time, a bell will sound, followed by the hymn. As the hymn begins, the third Advent candle is lit.

Hymn: A Stable Lamp Is Lighted *The Hymnal 1982 #104*





Words: © Richard Wilbur (b. 1921)
Music: *Andújar*, David Hurd (b. 1950)

76. 76. 66. 76

Reading

Lector A reading from Steven Charleston.

My sorrows are like seeds, pressed deep into the dark earth of my soul. I do not deny them. I do not forget them. But nor do I let them remain unchanged. Over time, I let their pain turn into wisdom, their grief into mercy, their anger into forgiveness. Hidden within me, I let the hurt they once carried become the compassion I now carry, compassion for all who have known what I have known, felt what I have felt, wept as I have wept. The ground of love transforms the seeds of sorrow to new life, new hope, new beginnings, through the mystery of soul-deep healing.

Lector Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people.
People ***Thanks be to God.***

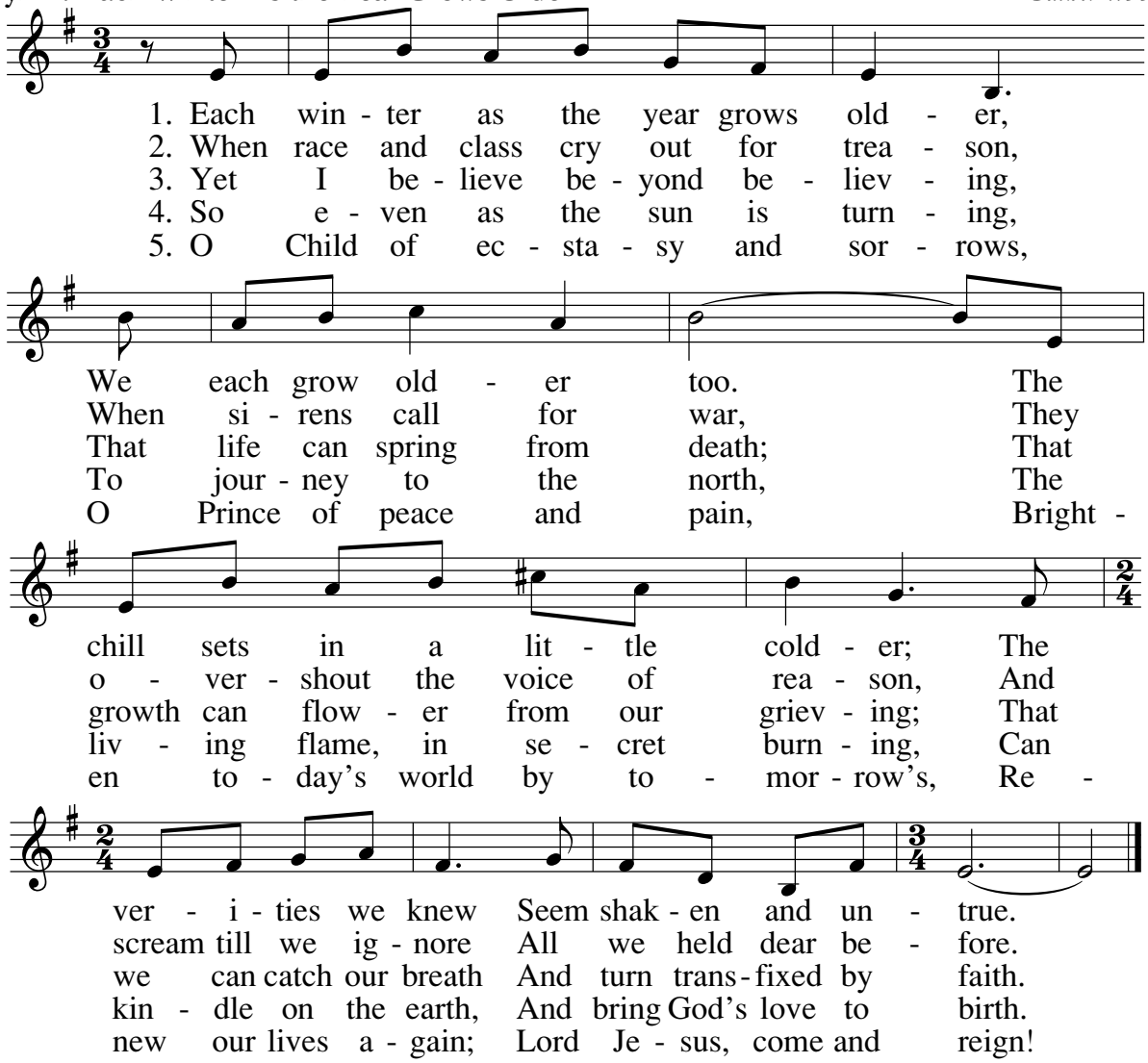
Reflection

Young Qiu

Silence

We will sit in silence after the reflection. A bell will sound to close this time, followed by chant.
As the chant begins, the fourth Advent candle is lit.

Hymn: Each Winter As the Year Grows Older *Gather #339*



Text: William Gay, fl.1969, © 1971, United Church Press
Tune: CAROL OF HOPE, 9 6 9 66; Annabeth Gay, b.1925, © 1971, United Church Press; acc. by Marty Haugen, b.1950, alt.

Reading

Lector A reading from Yehuda HaLevi.

'Tis a fearful thing
to love what death can touch.
A fearful thing
to love, to hope, to dream, to be –
to be,
And oh, to lose.

A thing for fools, this,
And a holy thing,
a holy thing
to love.
For your life has lived in me,
your laugh once lifted me,
your word was gift to me.
To remember this brings painful joy.
'Tis a human thing, love,
a holy thing, to love
what death has touched."

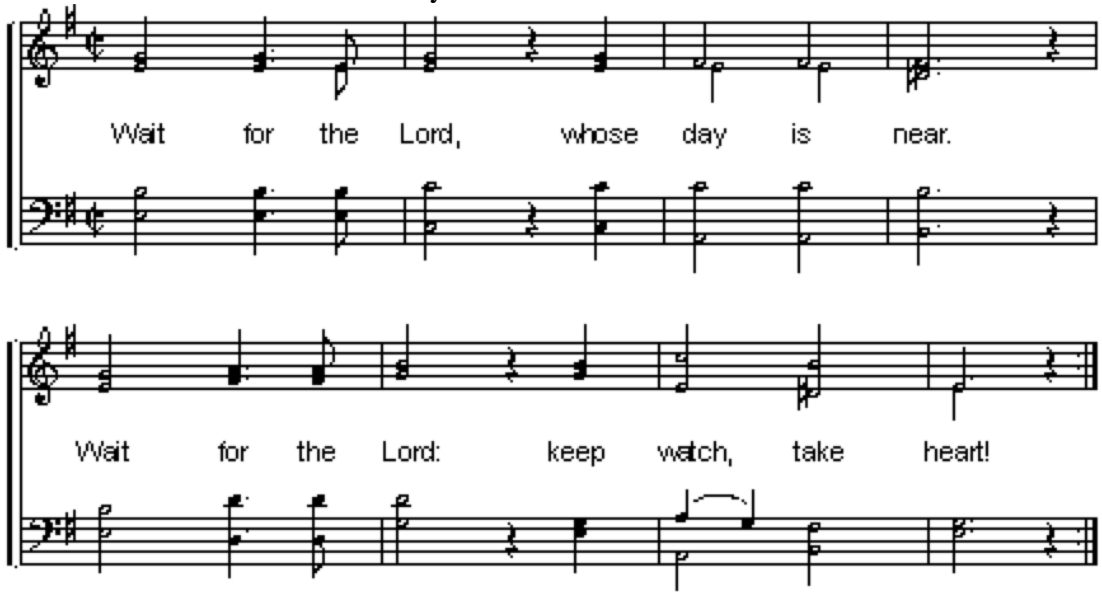
Lector Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people.
People ***Thanks be to God.***

Reflection *Elena Wong*

Silence

We will sit in silence after the reflection. A bell will sound to close this time, followed by chant. As the hymn begins, the fifth Advent candle is lit.

Chant: Wait For the Lord Whose Day Is Near *Taizé*



Prayers of the People

Presider Midwinter held great significance to our ancestors. Bonfires were kept burning through the night, enticing the dawn and thus beginning once again the mystical cycle of the changing seasons. Let these prayers be our bonfires rising up to God.

Intercessor Enliven the Church for its mission to bring Christ to the world. Breathe fresh life into your people to be beacons of light. In hope, we pray.

People ***O Come, Emmanuel.***

Intercessor We remember Joseph and Mary looking for a safe haven. We pray for today's refugees and immigrants seeking safety and for those who are working for gender justice in this perilous time. In hope, we pray.

People ***O Come, Emmanuel.***

Intercessor Awaken in us a sense of wonder and awe for the Earth, our common home. Teach us to care creatively for her resources. In hope, pray.

People ***O Come, Emmanuel.***

Intercessor As we experience Blue Christmas this afternoon, we acknowledge our sorrows, losses, and yearnings. In the midst of our woundedness, we ask for your comfort. In hope, we pray.

People ***O Come, Emmanuel.***

Intercessor We pray for those who are sick, in trouble, or suffering at this time, particularly those we name….
Give us strength to serve, to bring help and health to them. In hope, we pray.

People ***O Come, Emmanuel.***

Intercessor We pray in grateful memory for those who have died to this life and are now safe and whole in the bosom of Abraham. We lift up especially….
In hope, we pray.

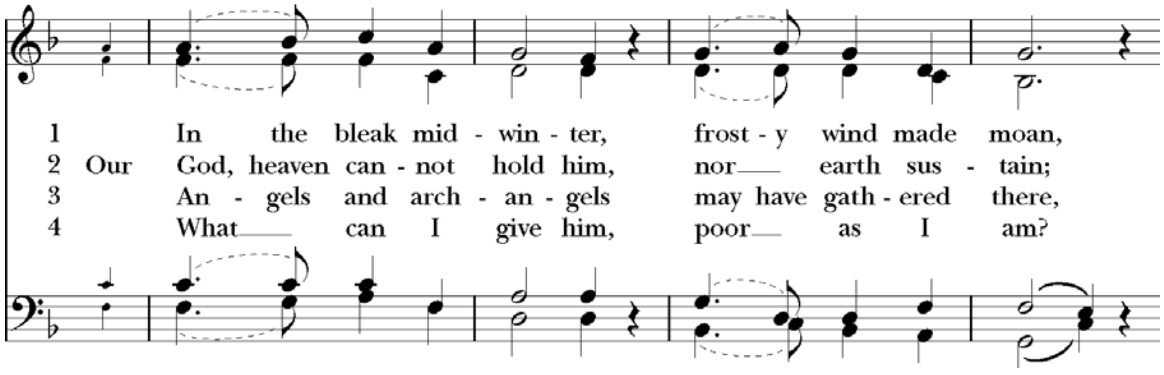
People ***O Come, Emmanuel.***

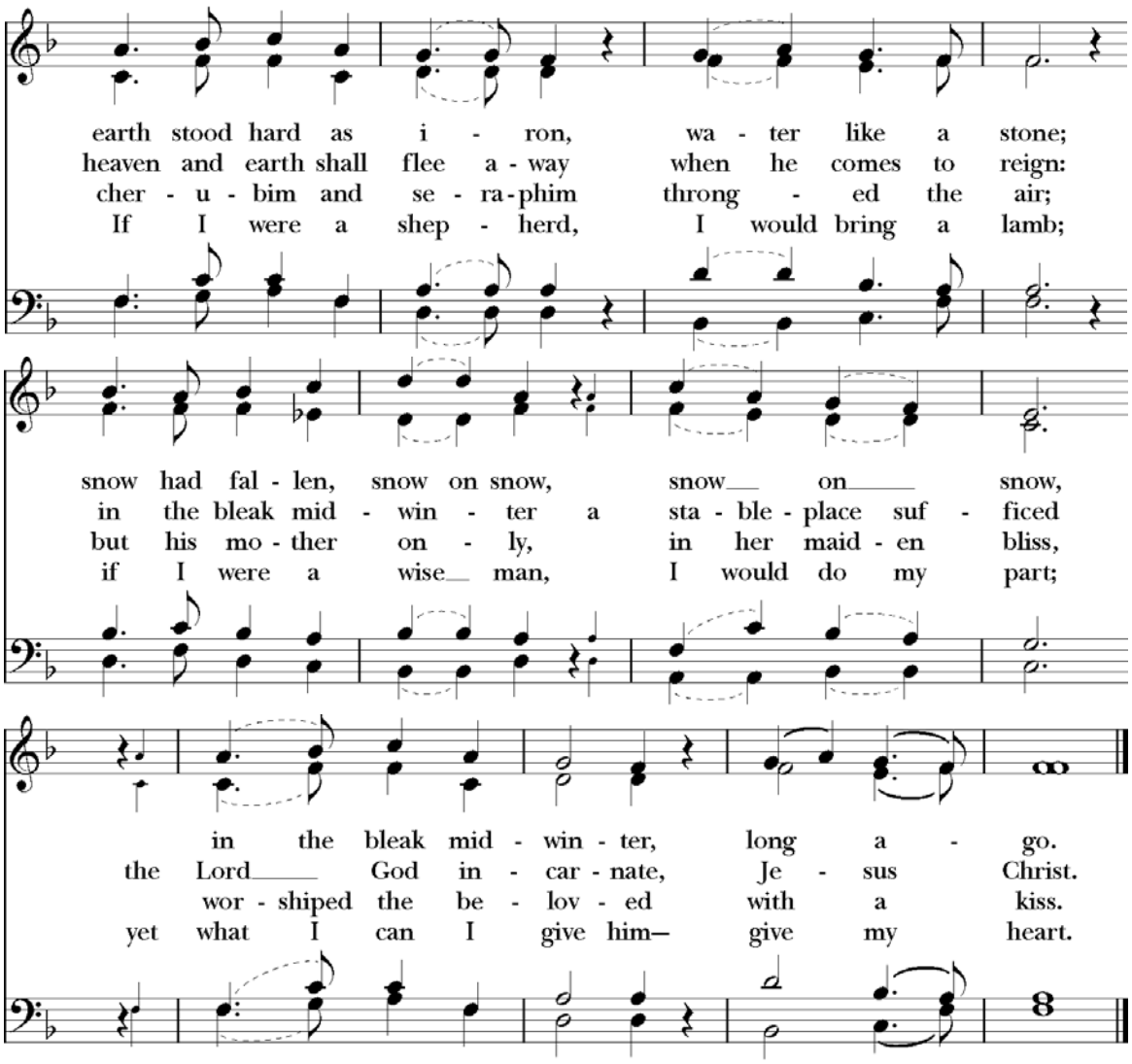
Presider On this the Winter Solstice, the darkest night of the year, we bring our prayers to you, our Hope: Jesus, light of the world. ***Amen.***

Presider
Throughout this service we have been holding longings or griefs in our hearts. We have prayed with them, sung with them, sat in silence with them. Now we are invited to write them down, to bring them forward placing them in the bowl on the altar. They will be burned and incorporated into the palm ashes we will use on Ash Wednesday when we return to the wilderness, led by God's promise of renewal.

As the hymn begins, all are invited to approach the altar to place our prayers. The sixth Advent candle is also lit.

Hymn: In the Bleak Midwinter





Words: Christina Rossetti (1830-1894) Music: *Cranham,* Gustav Theodore Holst (1874-1934)

Closing Prayer

Officiant

Be renewed in your faith, strengthened in all you believe. Be blessed in your spirit, lifted up once more to do what your heart tells you is your calling. Know that the Spirit is present to uplift us when we grow discouraged, to support us when we feel tired. Together we are offered streams of mercy from the deep springs of love.

Blessing for the Longest Night

Lector "A Blessing for the Longest Night" by Jan Richardson.

All throughout these months
as the shadows
have lengthened,
this blessing has been
gathering itself,
making ready,
preparing for
this night.

It has practiced
walking in the dark,
traveling with
its eyes closed,
feeling its way
by memory
by touch
by the pull of the moon
even as it wanes.

So believe me
when I tell you
this blessing will
reach you
even if you
have not light enough
to read it;
it will find you
even though you cannot
see it coming.

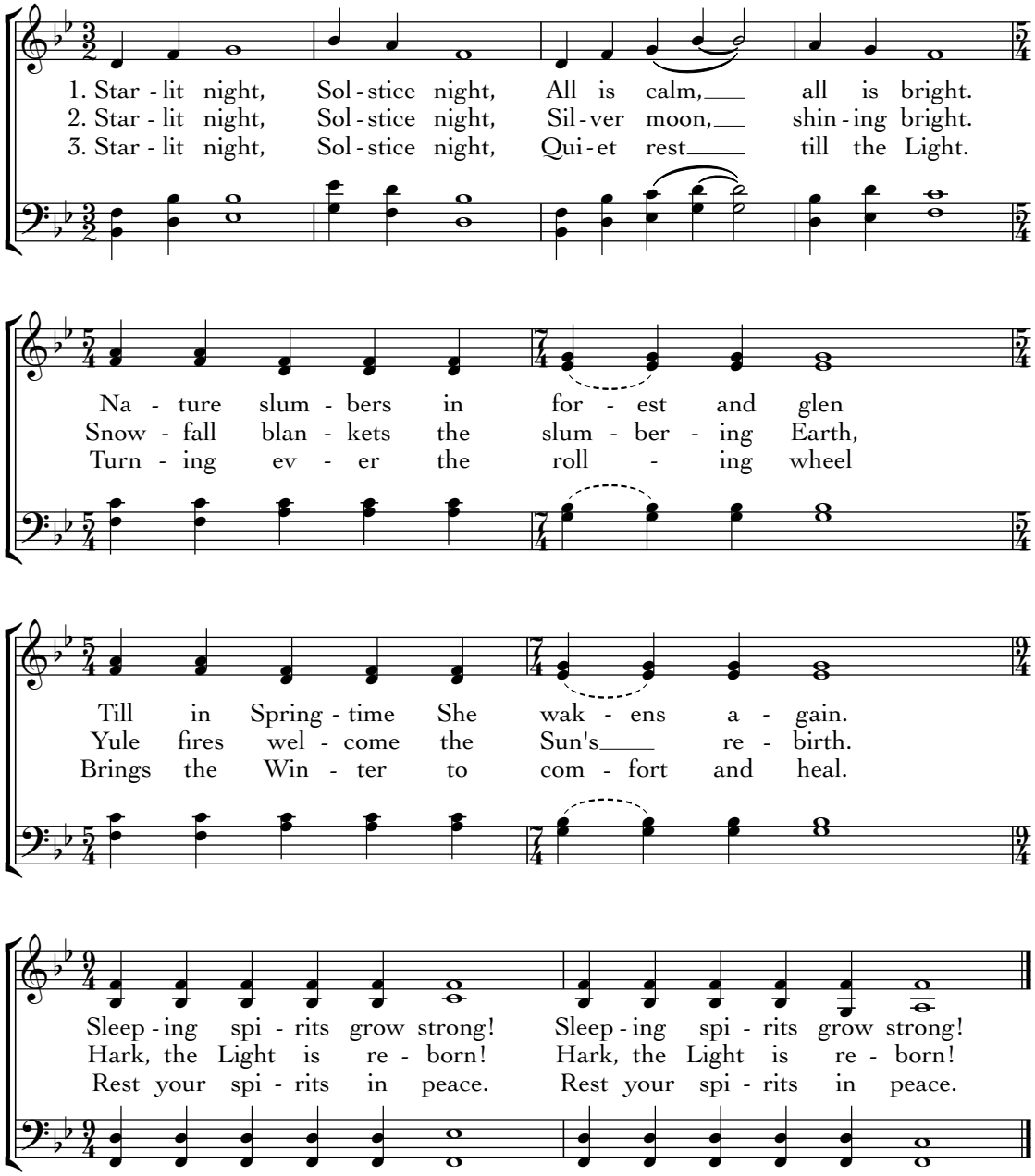
You will know
the moment of its
arriving
by your release
of the breath
you have held
so long;
a loosening
of the clenching
in your hands,
of the clutch
around your heart;
a thinning
of the darkness
that had drawn itself
around you.

This blessing
does not mean
to take the night
away but it knows
its hidden roads,
knows the resting spots
along the path,
knows what it means
to travel
in the company
of a friend.

So when
this blessing comes,
take its hand.
Get up.
Set out on the road
you cannot see.
This is the night
when you can trust
that any direction
you go,
you will be walking
toward the dawn.

As the final hymn begins, the seventh and final Advent candle is lit.

Hymn: Starlit Night, Solstice Night



Sources

- The cover image was originally created by Allison Wood for our first Blue Christmas service in 2019. Thank you, Allison!
- The poem by Yehuda HaLevi (c. 1075 – 1141) can be found online at https://www.nmhealth.org/publication/view/general/4697/
- The reading by Bishop Steven Charleston is from *Ladder to the Light: An Indigenous Elder's Meditations on Hope and Courage* (Broadleaf Books, 2021), p. 32.
- The reading from Esther de Waal is from *Living with Contradiction: An Introduction to Benedictine Spirituality* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1989, 1997), 17-19.
- The Prayers of the People were written by Doug and Leonor Barnett.
- The Closing Prayer is adapted from Bishop Steven Charleston's *Ladder to the Light,* the focus of our 2024 Advent Christan formation series.
- Jan Richardson's Blessing for the Longest Night was shared from her Facebook page on December 21, 2020: https://www.facebook.com/JanRichardsonAuthor/posts/on-this-winter-solstice-a-blessing-for-you-for-the-longest-night-in-a-very-very-/2806838519635509/
- The text of the closing hymn, "Starlit Night, Solstice Night," is by Ellen Cannon Reed, alt (*Silent Night* changed to *Starlit Night*); music: Charles Rus, 2021

Serving St. Aidan's

The Rev. Cameron Partridge &The Rev. Margaret Dyer-Chamberlain, *Presiders*
Charles Rus, *Interim Music Minister*
Anne Benninger, Sarah Glover, Lee Hammack, Janet Lohr, Paul Nocero,
Jim Oerther, Kateri Paul, Barbara Stevenson, *Choir*
Nancy Sabin, *Marimba*
The Rev. Mark Kuga Henderson, Young Qiu, & Elena Wong, *Reflections*
Betty Carmack, Doug Barnett, & Kateri Paul, *Lectors*
Dave Frangquist, *Sound & Zoom*

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