

December 18, 2022

5:00pm

St. Stephen United Methodist Church



Statement of Purpose

As Christians, we are called to be a visible witness to God's Word through faith in God and loving action toward our neighbors.

Statement of Inclusion

In response to our calling to share the message of God's unconditional love, we welcome people of all ages, genders, races, sexual orientations and identities, socioeconomic levels, and physical and mental abilities as full participants in our community of faith.

In light of the pain caused to the LGBTQ+ community by the Church, we are proud to be a reconciling congregation.

Celebration of Worship

Gathering in God's House

PRELUDE

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus
Michael Carr, piano

arr Mark Hayes

CALL TO WORSHIP

Rev Dr Geoffrey Moore

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
All things were made by God,
and without God nothing came to be.
What came to be through God was life,
and this life was the light of the world.
**The Light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.**

WELCOME

OPENING HYMN

O Little Town of Bethlehem

UMH 230

Sharing God's Unconditional Love

THE FIRST READING

Ecclesiastes 3:1–11

PSALTER

Psalm 22

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from helping me,
so far from the words of my groaning?

**O my God, I cry by day but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.**

In you, our ancestors trusted.

They trusted and you delivered them.

**It was you who brought me from the womb,
you who kept me safe on my mother's breast.**

Since my mother bore me, you have been my God.

Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

God does not despise the affliction of the afflicted.

God does not hide from me.

When I cry to God, God hears me.

Thanks be to God.

PSALTER

Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd;

I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;

he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul;

he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil; for thou art with me;

thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies;

thou annointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,

and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

MUSICAL INTERLUDE

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

arr Mark Hayes

THE SECOND READING

Isaiah 40
(selected verses)

MEMORY STARS

MUSICAL INTERLUDE

All Is Well

arr Lloyd Larson

Thanksgiving

LITANY OF REMEMBRANCE

We light this first candle

to remember those whom we have loved and lost.

We pause to remember clearly, their faces, their voices, their bodies.

We embrace and give thanks for the memories that bind them to us

in this season of expectation,

when all creation waits for the Light.

We remember them with love.

May God's eternal love surround them.

(sung)

O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel

That mourns in lonely exile here, until the son of God appear.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

A period of silent reflection

We light this second candle to remember the pain of loss:

loss of relationships, loss of trust, loss of jobs,

loss of health, loss of faith, the loss of joy.

We acknowledge and embrace the pain of the past, O God,

and offer it to you,

asking that into our wounded hearts and open hands

you place the gift of peace, shalom.

We remember that through you all things are possible.

Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into your future.

(sung)

**O come, thou Wisdom from on high,
And order all things far and nigh;
To us the path of knowledge show,
And cause us in her ways to go.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

A period of silent reflection

We light this third candle to remember ourselves this Christmas time.
We pause and remember the past weeks, months,
and for some of us years, that have been heavy with our burdens.
We accept and lay before you, O God, the sharpness of memory,
the sadness and grief, the hurt and fear, the anger and pain.
We accept and lay before you the ways we feel we have fallen short,
and the times we have spent blaming ourselves, and you,
for all that we have suffered.
We accept and lay before you the time we have walked alone,
in darkness; and in knowledge of our own mortality.
**We remember that though we have journeyed far, and that,
while lost, we may have turned away from the light,
the light itself has not failed.**
**We remember that though winter be upon us
and though the night be dark,
with the turning of the wheel the dawn will come,
and dawn defeats the darkness.**

(sung)

**O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer
Our spirits by thy advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

A period of silent reflection

We light this fourth candle to remember faith, the gift of light and hope that God offers to us in the stories of Hanukkah and of Christmas, which both also began in abandonment, insecurity, and humbleness, in a time of war and in a poor stable.

We remember that the loving God who kept the light shining in the temple and who came to share this life with us promises us comfort and peace.

**We remember the One who shares our burdens,
who shows us the way to the Light,
and who journeys with us into all our tomorrows.**

(sung)

**O come, Desire of nations, bind
All peoples in one heart and mind.
Bid then our sad divisions cease,
And be thyself our King of Peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

A period of silent reflection

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God of wisdom,
we come to you this Christmas Season tired, in turmoil, and in pain.
As the nights have grown longer,
so has darkness grown and wrapped itself around our hearts.
In this season of longest night,
we ask your healing blessings upon all that we carry in our hearts:
sorrow we fear may never end,
wounds we cannot even put into words.
Lord, hear our prayer,
and in your merciful love, answer.

God of mercy and compassion,
there are those of us who are grieving over what might have been.
Death or loss or terrible hurt has changed our experience of Christmas.

We remember that once it was a special day for us, too,
but someone or something precious has gone away from us in this life.
We have lost a beloved, a job, a goal, a cause, a dream.
We find ourselves adrift and alone.
We are weary from the journey, and we have found no room at the inn.
We come to you seeking rest, and peace, and shelter from the storm.
Lord, hear our prayer,
and in your merciful love, answer.

God of grace, in the spirit of the season, grant us all that we need
to comfort us as we journey through this Christmas season.
We ask that you shelter and sustain all those of us,
both here and throughout the world,
who wander or want or weep or are heavy laden,
that we may be lifted up in courage and journey on in thy peace.
Lord, hear our prayer,
and in your merciful love, answer.

God of love, in this Christmas Season we embrace and offer up to you
all that used to be which is now lost to us and cannot be again.
With celebration all around us, memories of what was,
and fears of what may be, weigh heavy on our hearts.
Please hold us close in your embrace, be near to us this night,
until the light returns and morning comes.
Lord, hear our prayer,
and in your merciful love, answer.

Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work or watch or weep this night,
and give thine angels charge over those who sleep.
Tend the sick, Lord; give rest to the weary, bless the dying,
soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous;
and all for thy love's sake.
Amen.

THE THIRD READING

Luke 2:1–7

OFFERING OF LIGHT

Let us pray:

Gentle God of love,

**help us reach out together for the light of faith,
for renewal and recovery and a new day coming.**

**Grant that hope may come to rest in our hearts,
and let it go forth with us into the darkness,
this night and in the nights to come, until we see the dawn.**

Lighten our darkness, we beseech you, O God;
give us light in the night season; and by your great mercy
defend us from all perils and dangers of this night. **Amen.**

MUSICAL INTERLUDE

Ryan Forkner

PSALTER

Psalm 121

**I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills,
whence cometh my help.**

**My help cometh from the Lord,
who hath made heaven and earth.**

**He will not suffer thy foot to be moved;
he that keepeth thee will not slumber;
behold, the God that keepeth Israel
shall neither slumber nor sleep.**

The Lord is thy keeper;

The Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand.

The sun shall not smite thee by day nor the moon at night.

**The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil
and shall sustain thy soul.**

**He shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in,
from this time forth and even forevermore.**

Sending Forth

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING

Almighty God,

**we thank you for your constant love
and for the blessings of this day.**

**We know that even when we cannot see or feel you,
still you are there.**

**Help us to remember you and to listen for your voice
in the words of family, friends, and strangers.**

**Kindle our hearts and awaken hope,
that we may know you as you reveal yourself
in the world and in our lives.**

**Let the light of your holy Spirit shine like these candles in the darkness,
lighting the way for all who feel despairing, lost, or forgotten.**

**Grant that this light may come to dwell so deeply in our hearts
that when we leave this place it may shine on,
for us and for those we meet along the way. Amen.**

HYMN

Silent Night, Holy Night

UMH 239

CONCLUDING PRAYERS

Another day will come, O God.

**I know not what it may bring forth,
but make me ready, God, for whatever it may be.**

If I am to stand up, help me to stand bravely.

If I am to sit still, help me to sit quietly.

If I am to lie low, help me to do it patiently.

And if I am to do nothing, help me do it gallantly.

**Make these words more than words,
and give me the Spirit of thy Peace. Amen.**

O God, support us all the day long in this troubled life,
 until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes,
 and the busy world is hushed,
 and the fever of life is over, and our work is done.
 Then Lord, in thy mercy, grant us safe lodging,
 and a holy rest, and peace at the last. **Amen.**

BLESSING AND DISMISSAL

The Lord bless you and keep you;
 the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you;
 the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace,
 both now and forever more. **Amen.**

The peace of the Lord be always with you.
And also with you.

The Blue Christmas service used tonight is based on an order developed and used at The Cathedral Church of Saint Andrew, Honolulu, Hawaii.

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