



2020

Opening Recorded Music - Comfort, Comfort Now My People, St. Anne's Choir

- 1 "Comfort, comfort now my people;  
tell of peace!" So says our God.  
Comfort those who sit in darkness  
mourning under sorrow's load.  
To God's people now proclaim  
that God's pardon waits for them!  
Tell them that their war is over;  
God will reign in peace forever.
  
- 2 For the herald's voice is crying  
in the desert far and near,  
calling us to true repentance,  
since the reign of God is here.  
Oh, that warning cry obey!  
Now prepare for God a way.  
Valleys, rise to greet the Savior;  
hills, bow down in humble favor.

3 Straight shall be what long was crooked,  
and the rougher places plain.  
Let your hearts be true and humble,  
as befits God's holy reign.  
For the glory of the Lord  
now on earth is shed abroad,  
and all flesh shall see the token  
that God's word is never broken.

Text: Johann G. Olearius, 1635-1711; tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1827-1878, alt.

### Welcome and Call to Worship

Officiant: 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.

### The First Reading: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

<sup>2</sup> a time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

<sup>3</sup> a time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to break down, and a time to build up;

<sup>4</sup> a time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

<sup>5</sup> a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;

a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

<sup>6</sup> a time to seek, and a time to lose;

a time to keep, and a time to throw away;  
<sup>7</sup> a time to tear, and a time to sew;  
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;  
<sup>8</sup> a time to love, and a time to hate;  
a time for war, and a time for peace.

## 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.

## 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.

Music Interlude

Litany of Remembrance

The first candle is lit.

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.

A period of silent reflection

The second candle is lit.

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 we offer it to You, asking that into our wounded hearts and open hands You will 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.

A period of silent reflection

The third candle is lit.

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, 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.

A period of silent reflection

The fourth candle is lit.

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.

A period of silent reflection

Fifth Candle is lit.

We light the fifth candle to acknowledge our present burdens: the virus among us, the economic strains upon us, the political strife among us, and the heaviness of these troubled times. We feel the isolation, the anxiety, the boredom, the separation, and the lack of a sense of normalcy. We seek that which we cannot have: a clear end to this turmoil and a release from our worries and fears. We know the future is always uncertain, but we feel that uncertainty more deeply now than we have in the past. May the God of the future reach into our present moment with a new sense of hope and relief.

Silent reflection

Sixth Candle is lit.

We light the sixth candle to lift up others whose lives are also unsettled. We know that no life is free of loss and sorrow. Even as we feel our own distress, we do not want to overlook our neighbors who stand in need of prayer and support. May the God of healing touch us, those we love, those we know, and those whose names and stories we will never know.

### The 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 among 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.

Third Reading: Luke 2:1-7

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup>This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup>All went to their own towns to be registered. <sup>4</sup>Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. <sup>5</sup>He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup>While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. <sup>7</sup>And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.



## Prayers for Light

One story we celebrate in this season tells how a few brave fighters, defending their temple, had only enough oil to light the sacred lamp for one day, but it burned eight days until relief arrived. Our Jewish friends and neighbors commemorate this event in the festival of Hanukkah.

Another story tells how in a little hill town a humble couple with far from home took shelter in a stable among the animals and gave birth to a light that would change the world. Christians celebrate this event as the festival of Christmas.

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.

## Psalm 121

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills,  
from 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.

### Prayer

Let us pray.

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, and grant that it may come to dwell so deeply in our hearts that it may shine on, for us and for those we meet along the way. Amen.

Silent Night recorded - St. Anne's Choir

Silent night, holy night,  
All is calm, all is bright  
Round yon Virgin Mother and Child,

Holy Infant, so tender and mild.  
Sleep in heavenly peace.  
Silent night, holy night,

Shepherds quake at the sight;  
Glories stream from heaven afar,  
Heavenly hosts sing alleluia;  
Christ, the Savior, is born!  
Silent night, holy night,  
Son of God, love's pure light  
Radiant beams from thy holy face,  
With the dawn of redeeming grace,  
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

### Concluding Prayers

Let us pray.  
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 faithfully.  
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 in that peace, may you love and serve the Lord and your neighbors. Amen.

## The Day You Gave Us Lord Has Ended - St. Anne's Choir

- 1 The day you gave us, Lord, has ended;  
the darkness falls at your behest.  
To you our morning hymns ascended;  
your praise shall hallow now our rest.
- 2 We thank you that your church, unsleeping  
while earth rolls onward into light,  
through all the world its watch is keeping,  
and never rests by day or night.
- 3 As to each continent and island  
the dawn leads on another day,  
the voice of prayer is never silent,

nor dies the strain of praise away.

4 The sun, here having set, is waking  
your children under western skies,  
and hour by hour, as day is breaking,  
fresh hymns of thankful praise arise.

5 So be it, Lord; your realm shall never,  
like earth's proud empires, pass away;  
but stand and grow and rule forever,  
till all your creatures own your sway.

Text: John Ellerton, 1826-1893, alt.