

Quispamsis United Church
December 12, 2023 – 7:00 p.m.
Walking in the Christmas Shadows
A Light in the Darkness
Presider: Rev. Ian Manson
Music: Sue King and Wendy Stewart

We Gather in Hope

Musical Preludes:

Spirit of the Living God, Fall Afresh on Me
Lament for the Death of the Reverend Archie Beaton

Welcome

Affirm Statement and Acknowledgement of Territory

Call of Worship

As we gather here tonight in this safe space,
may the mystery of a Holy Presence
that knows no boundaries of walls and space
surround us

and grant us mercy, peace and love.

We come, bringing our sorrow, loneliness, and sadness.

we come seeking a place to set them down.

A place where our words will be heard

a place where our feelings will be honoured

a place where our hearts can be tender,

and where we know that we are not alone.

Be among us this night, O Holy One.

Comfort us. Strengthen us. Care for us.

Be born in us this night. Amen.

Opening Prayer:

**Spirit of love and understanding,
draw near to us this night.**

**Help us find respite from our struggles.
and hope for our weary spirits.**

**In this time,
may your comfort envelop us like a bear hug
or warm blanket when we are cold.**

Be with us, this night and always. Amen.

Hymn:

**Come and Find the Quiet Center
Come and find the quiet centre
in the crowded life we lead,
find the room for hope to enter,
find the frame where we are freed:
clear the chaos and the clutter,
clear our eyes, that we can see
all the things that really matter,
be at peace, and simply be.**

VU 374

**Silence is a friend who claims us,
cools the heat and slows the pace,
God it is who speaks and names us,
knows our being, face to face,
making space within our thinking,
lifting shades to show the sun,
raising courage when we're shrinking,
finding scope for faith begun.**

**In the Spirit let us travel,
open to each other's pain,
let our loves and fears unravel,
celebrate the space we gain:
there's a place for deepest dreaming,
there's a time for heart to care,
in the Spirit's lively scheming
there is always room to spare!**

Lighting of the Advent Candles

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

**We shall light a candle of hope
to fight back the shadows.**

**We shall not live in fear
of where the road will take us.**

The road is uncertain and the air so cold;
political rivals wrestle for power;
peace seems so fragile;
what shall we do?

**We shall light a candle of peace
to fight back the cold.**

**We shall not live in fear
of where the path will take us.**

The path is unfamiliar
and fear of the unknown may block our way home;
what shall we do?

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

These candles? Will that be enough?

For the journey is long, the road uncertain, and the night is very dark.

It will be a start.

**As the flames dance,
we will rejoice that God's grace and compassion
surrounds us always.**

**We are children of the light,
we are followers of the Way.
and we know that faith, hope and love abide.**

Sing:

A Candle is Burning

VU 6 v 1,2,3,

**A candle is burning, a flame warm and bright,
a candle of hope in December's dark night.
While angels sing blessings from heaven's starry sky,
our hearts we prepare now for Jesus is nigh.**

**A candle is burning, a candle of peace,
a candle to signal that conflict must cease:
for Jesus is coming to show us the way;
a message of peace humbly laid in the hay.**

**A candle is burning, a candle of joy,
a candle to welcome brave Mary's new boy.
Our hearts fill with wonder, and eyes light and glow
as joy brightens winter like sunshine on snow.**

We Listen in Hope

Scripture: Isaiah 35: 3- 6 a

"Strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees.

Say to those who are of a fearful heart.

"Be strong, do not fear!

Here is your God... God will come and save you.

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened;

the lame shall leap like a deer,

and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy."

Reading: "First Coming" Madeleine L'Engle

He did not wait till the world was ready,

till men and nations were at peace.

He came when the Heavens were unsteady,

and prisoners cried out for release.

He did not wait for the perfect time.

He came when the need was deep and great.

He dined with sinners in all their grime,

turned water into wine.

He did not wait till hearts were pure.

In joy he came to a tarnished world of sin and doubt.

To a world like ours, of anguished shame he came,

and his Light would not go out.

*He came to a world which did not mesh,
to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.
In the mystery of the Word made Flesh
the Maker of the stars was born.*

*We cannot wait till the world is sane
to raise our songs in joyful voice
for to share our grief, to touch our pain,
He came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!*

**These are words of hope for the weary;
a way for those who are groping in the shadows.**

We Respond in Hope

Duet: "You Are Our Hiding Place"

A Liturgy of Remembering:

We name our losses before God,
 the loss of health and security
 the loss of a child
 the loss of an infant yet unborn
 the loss of a partner in life,
 the loss of a parent,
 the loss of a family member,
 the loss of a friend,
 the loss of a loved one,
 the loss of a pet,
 the loss of a cherished dream,
 the loss of independence,
 the loss of self-confidence,
 the loss of companionship,
 the loss of hope,
 the loss of peace,
 the loss of trust,
 the loss of love.

We name our own particular losses in silence before God: moments of memory – the good ones and the hard ones – the reflection on the feelings that have been ours. We pause and remember... (*a time of silence*). Amen.

Candle lighting

We light candles tonight in honour of the life journey that brings us to this night. We light a candle for memories, for prayer, for healing, for courage, and for our love expressed in community.

1. Lighting the Candle of Memories.

This candle represents our memories - for the times we laughed together, cried together, were angry with each other, or overjoyed with each other.

We light this candle for the memories of caring and joy we shared together. (*A Candle is Lit*)

2. The Candle of Prayer

Christmas can be a time of loneliness for many. As COVID continues to disrupt our world, loved ones may be isolated in a long term care home or hospital. We may not be able to gather with families and friends in familiar ways, and can become disconnected from ourselves, from others, and from God.

However, Jeremiah reminds us that:

“When you call upon me, and come and pray to me, I will hear you.” (Jeremiah 29:12)

A candle is lit.

We light this candle of prayer, remembering that God always hears our prayers.

3. The Candle of Healing

The cards and emails used to celebrate the joyous time of the holiday season can be welcome, but sometimes fall short. What we often long for are notes of consolation, anything to fill the void left by our losses. We think of Christmas dinner and we long for all to be present. There is love and goodwill all around, and yet our hearts are unable to embrace it. Life can be lonely and empty. We often beg God to fill us and yet we do not feel heard.

However, Psalm 46 declares:

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”

(A candle is lit.)

We light the candle, asking for healing of our broken hearts, knowing that with God new life can be found.

4. Lighting the Candle of Courage and Peace

This candle symbolizes the courage to confront our sorrow, to comfort each other, and to dare to hope in the midst of pain.

We know that we cannot change what has befallen. We can pray for the wisdom of acceptance and the grace that would enable us to move forward.

(A candle is lit)

As we light this candle we pray for courage that will lead to the peace that surpasses all understanding.

5. Lighting the Candle of Love and Community

We light this candle in honour of the love we have given, and the love we have received. This candle honours the care and support that we received from family and friends who have walked with us through all life's seasons.

(A candle is lit)

We remember and give thanks for their friendly faces, their warm embraces, and the empathy of their presence.

Prayer:

**Each gift we have received,
from you it came, O God.
Each thing for which we hope,
from your love it will be given.
Kindle in our hearts within
a flame of love to our neighbours,
to our foes, to our friends, to our loved ones all. Amen.**

Gaelic traditional

Lighting of the Christ Candle

In the centre of this circle, we light the Christ candle, remembering that the Spirit of Christ is always in the centre of our lives, knows our hearts and, in the midst of all our thoughts and emotions, offers us hope and healing.

(Light the Christ candle.)

The Lord's Prayer

If you are able, I invite you to come forward to light a candle or candles in memory of a loved one, or for a circumstance that leaves you in special need of God's grace and peace. If those of you at home have a candle with you, I also invite you to invite to light it now.

Sing:

Hope Is a Star

VU 7

**Hope is a star that shines in the night,
leading us on till the morning is bright.
When God is a child there's joy in our sing.
The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong, and none shall be afraid.**

**Peace is a ribbon that circles the earth,
giving a promise of safety and worth.
When God is a child there's joy in our song.
The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong, and none shall be afraid.**

**Joy is a song that welcomes the dawn,
telling the world that the Saviour is born.
When God is a child there's joy in our song.
The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong, and none shall be afraid.**

**Love is a flame that burns in our hearty.
Jesus has come and will never depart.
When God is a child there's joy in our song.
The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong, and none shall be afraid.**

A litany of affirming the presence of God

All of us know times of challenge and loss. So let us recall the words of Paul's letter to the church in Rome, which remind us that God will never fail us. After each line, I invite you to respond "yes."

Does God's love triumph over all? **(Yes.)**

Over trouble? **(Yes)**

Over suffering? **(Yes.)**

What about hard times? **(Yes.)**

Over hunger? **(Yes.)**

Over danger? **(Yes.)**

Even over death? **(Yes.)**

Does God's love triumph over everything? **(Yes.)**

Indeed, nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love for us in Christ Jesus!

All: Thanks be to God!

We Scatter in Hope

Hymn

O Come O Come Emmanuel
O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lowly exile here
until the Son of God appear.

VU 1, vs. 1,2,5,6

Refrain

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

O come, O Wisdom from on high,
who orders all things mightily;
to us the path of knowledge show,
and teach us in her ways to go. R

O come, O Key of David, come,
and open wide our heavenly home;
make safe the way that leads on high,
and close the path to misery. R

O come, O Dayspring, from on high,
and cheer us by your drawing nigh;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight. R

Blessing

Know that as you go into this night, you are not alone.

Know that as you carry the joys and sorrows of this season in your heart, God is with you.

Know that the very birth of Christ we anticipate in this Yule time brings with it compassion beyond compare.

Know, beloved of God, that you are in God and God is in you, now and always. Go in peace.

Amen.