## Welcome Home! Blue Christmas Service

\*please light candles for your loved ones as you enter December 17, 2023

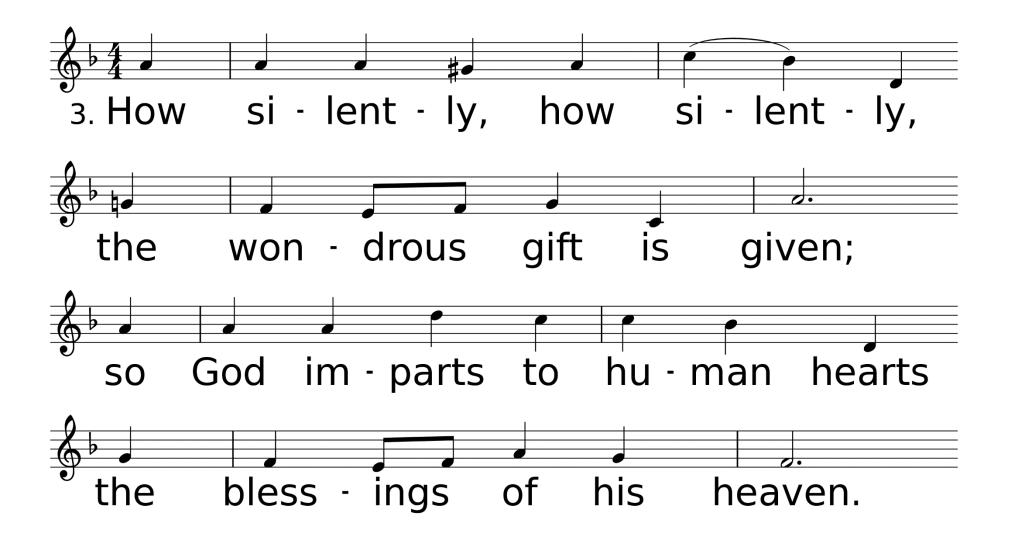
# Words of Explanation & Encouragement

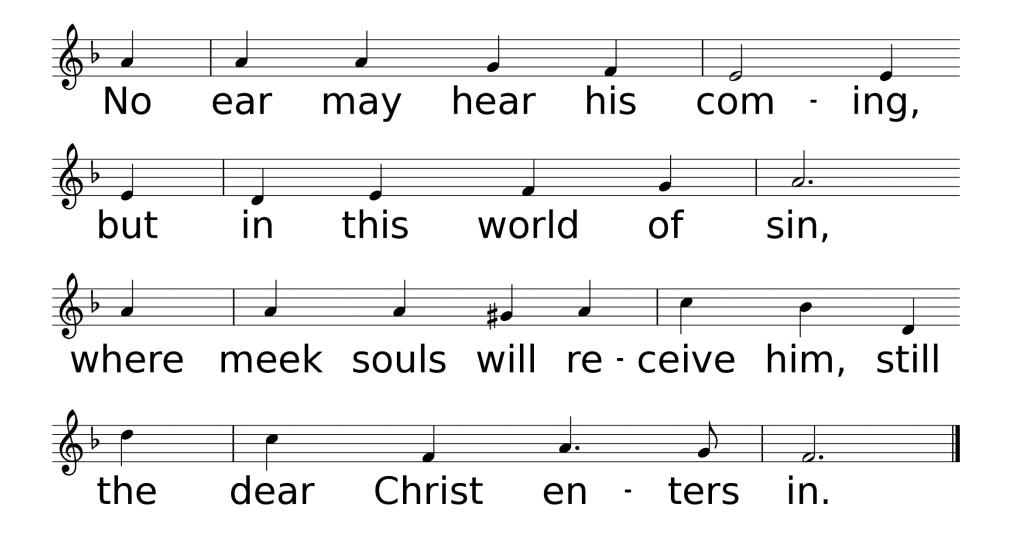
## \*Hymn O Little Town of Bethlehem

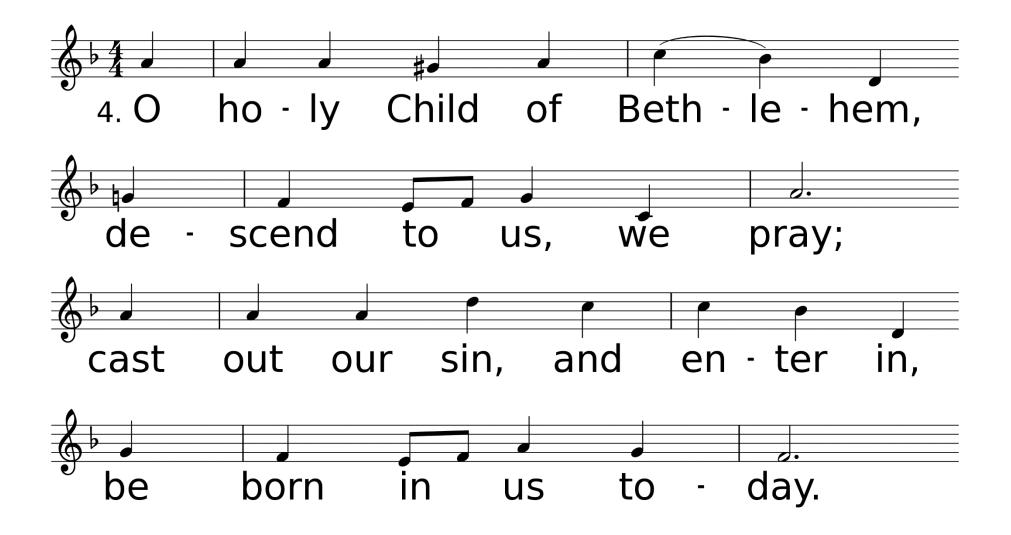
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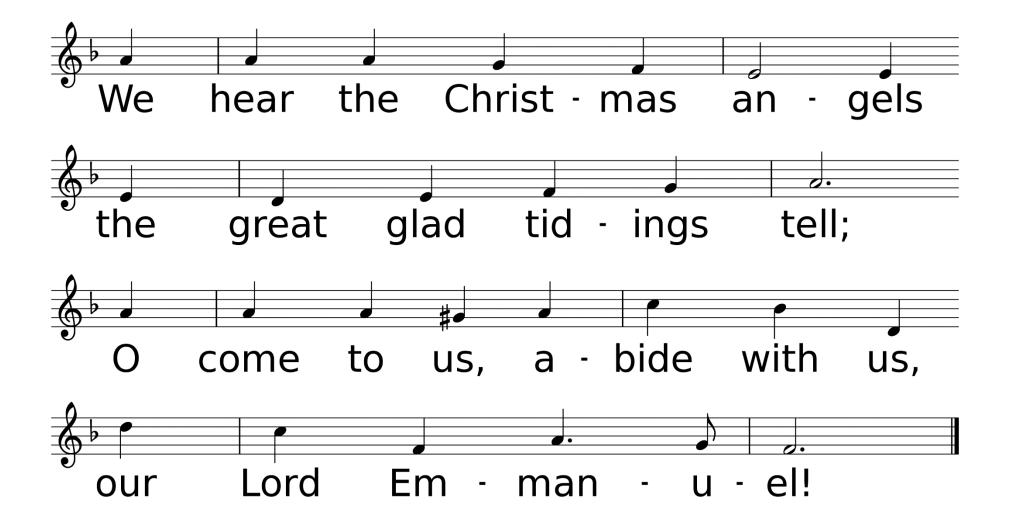












## First Reading Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,

a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to search and a time to give up,

a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace. What do workers gain from their toil?

I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

Psalm 22 Leader: 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?

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

#### Leader:

In you, our ancestors trusted. They trusted and you delivered them.

Congregation: 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.

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

Congregation: 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.

## Second Reading Isaiah 43:1-3A

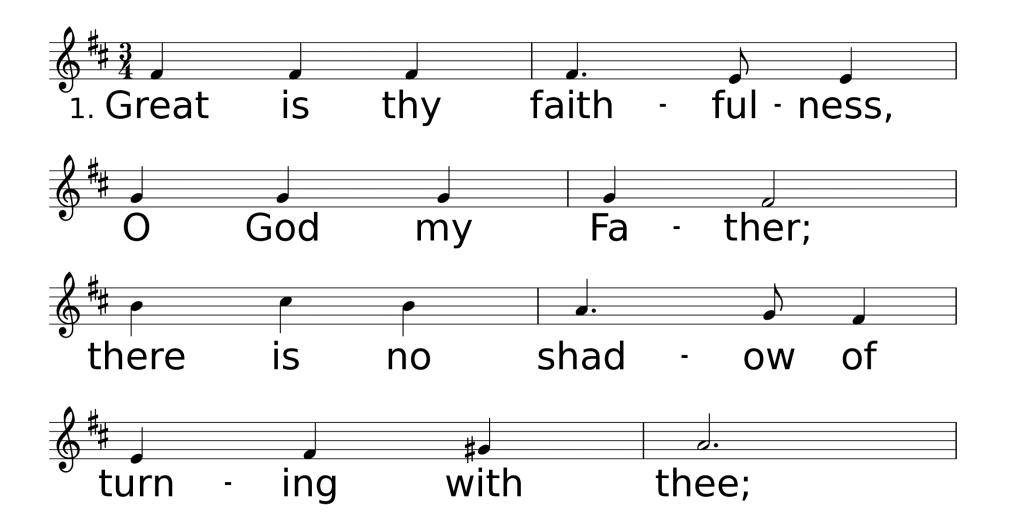
But now, this is what the LORD says he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

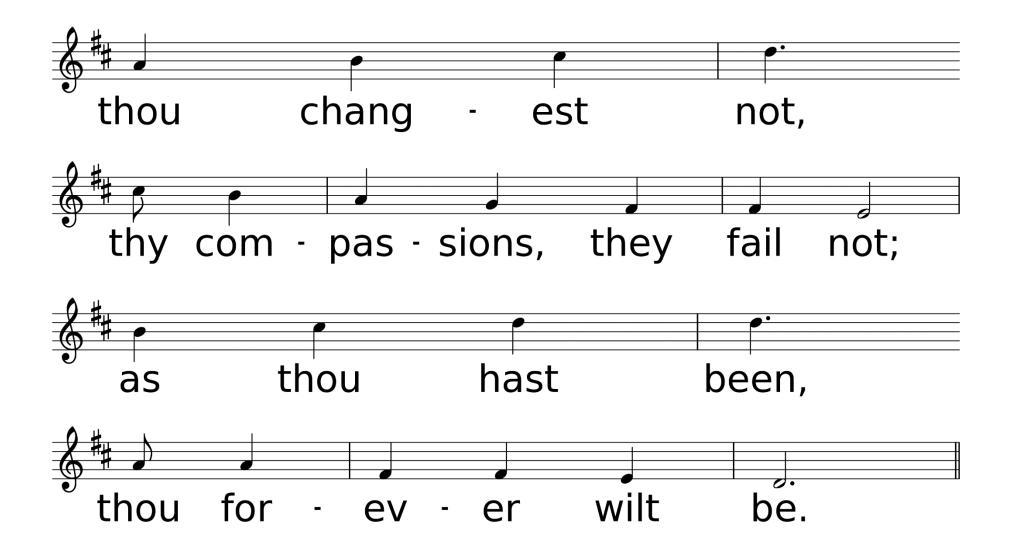
For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

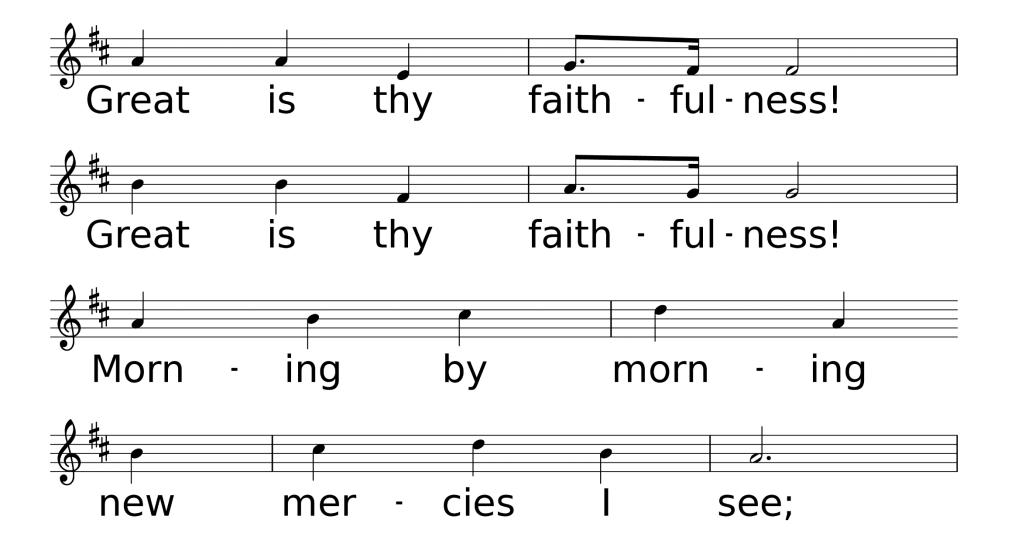
# \*Hymn Great is Thy Faithfulness

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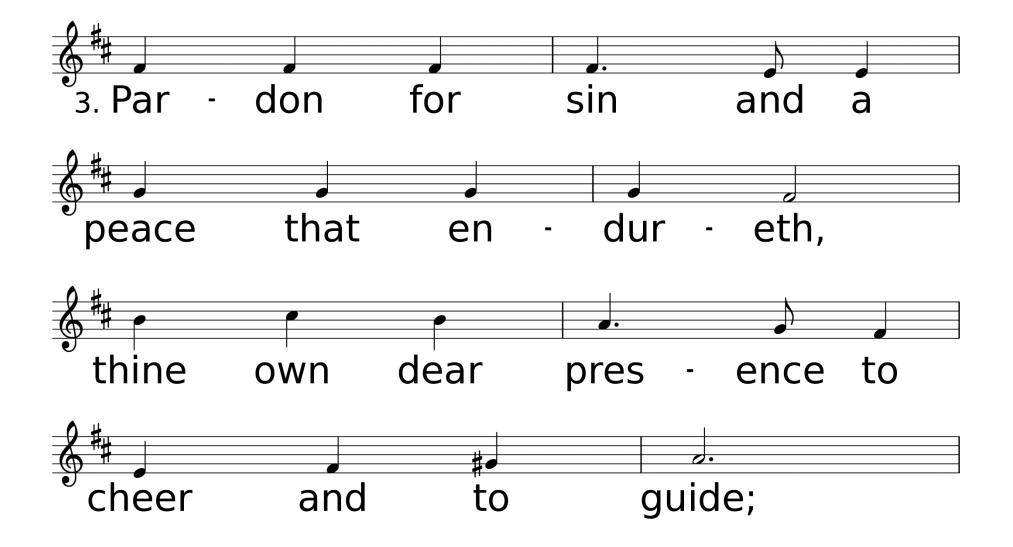


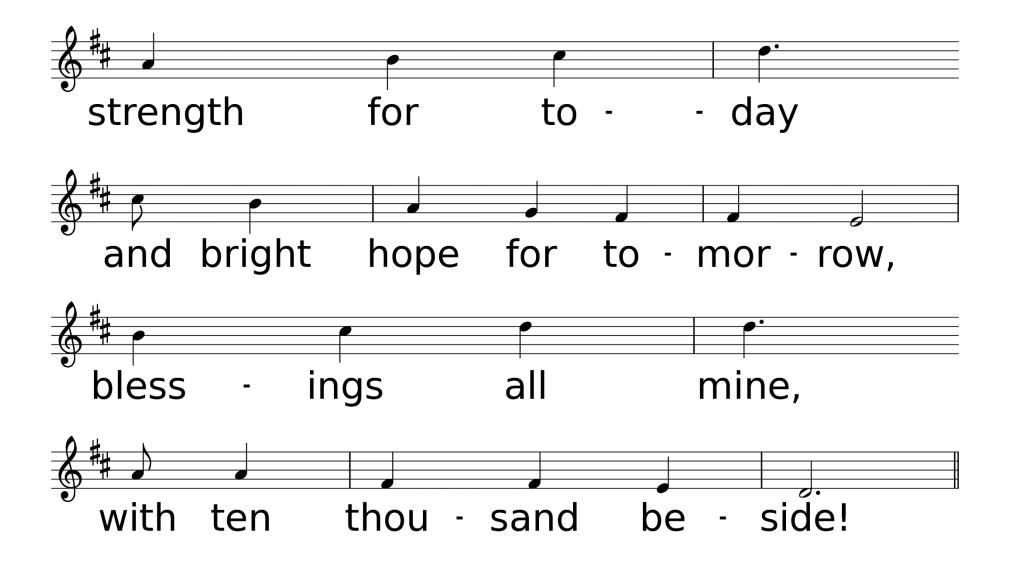
WORDS: Thomas O. Chisholm, 1923 (Lam. 3:22-23); © 1923, renewed 1951 Hope Publishing Company, Carol Stream, IL 60188. All rights reserved. Used by permission. MUSIC (FAITHFULNESS 11 10.11 10 with Refrain): William M. Runyan, 1923; © 1923, renewed 1951 Hope Publishing Co., Carol Stream, IL 60188. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

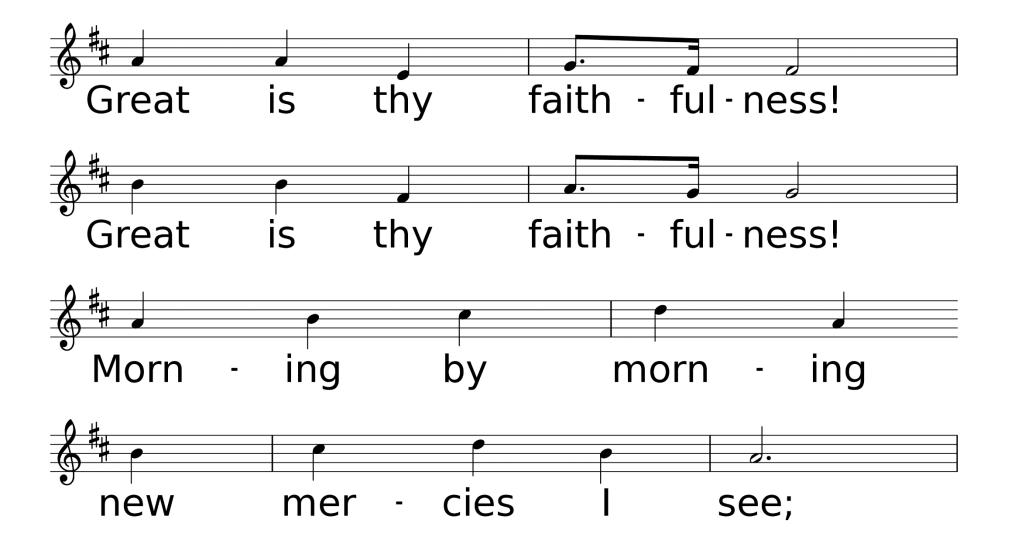














## Litany of Remembrance First Candle is Lighted

#### Leader:

We light this first candle to remember those whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember clearly, their faces and their voices. 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.

**Congregation:** We remember them with love. May God's eternal love surround them.

Sung Response 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.

# Second Candle is Lighted

Leader: 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, and the loss of "normalcy."

Leader: 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.

**Congregation:** We remember that through You all things are possible. Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into Your future.

Sung Response 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.

### Silent Reflection Third Candle is Lighted

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.

#### Congregation: 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 light defeats the darkness.

Sung Response O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer our spirits by thy justice here; disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put to flight. **Rejoice!** Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

### Silent Reflection Fourth Candle is Lighted



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

Leader: 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.

**Congregation:** 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 Response O come, Desire of nations bind all peoples in one heart and mind. From dust thou brought us forth to life; deliver us from earthly strife. Rejoice! **Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to** thee, O Israel.

### Laying Our Burdens Down

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### Silent Reflection

Third Reading Isaiah 40: 1-5, 11, & 28-31

**Comfort, comfort my people, says** your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. **Every valley shall be raised up,** every mountain and hill made low;

the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;

but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

# 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 -

## Congregation: Lord, hear our prayer.

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.

## Congregation: Lord, hear our prayer.

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.

## Congregation: Lord, hear our prayer.

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.

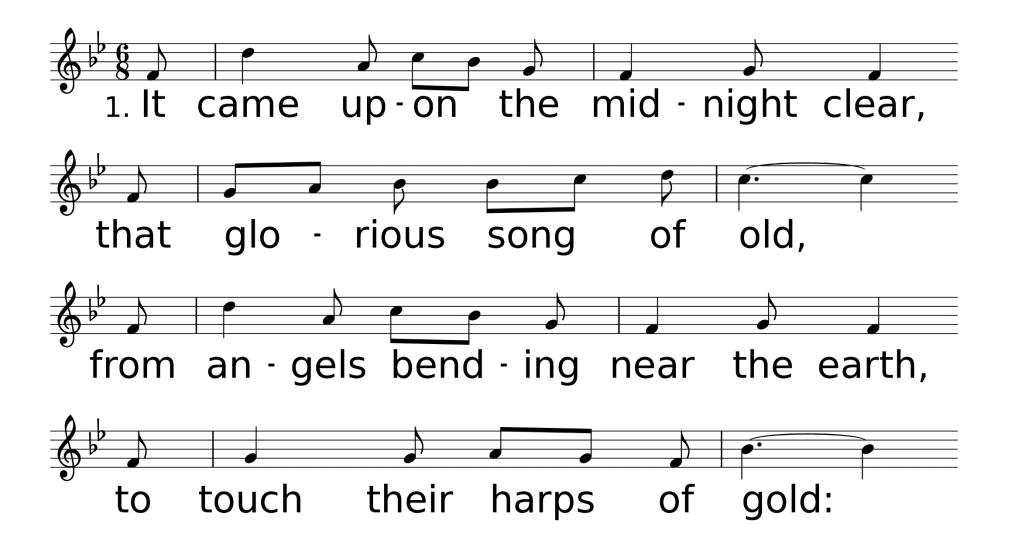
## Congregation: Lord, hear our prayer.

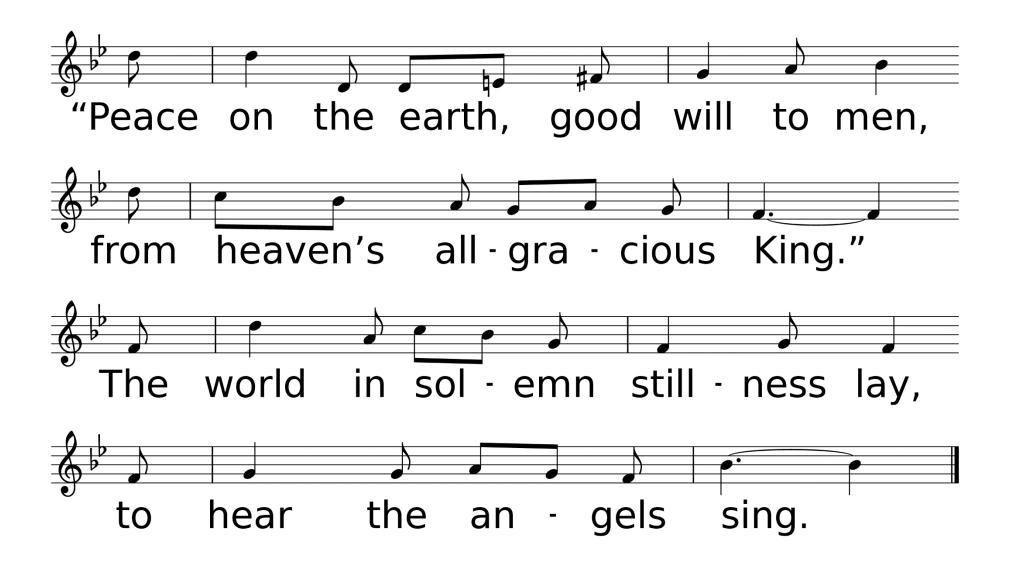
Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for thy love's sake.

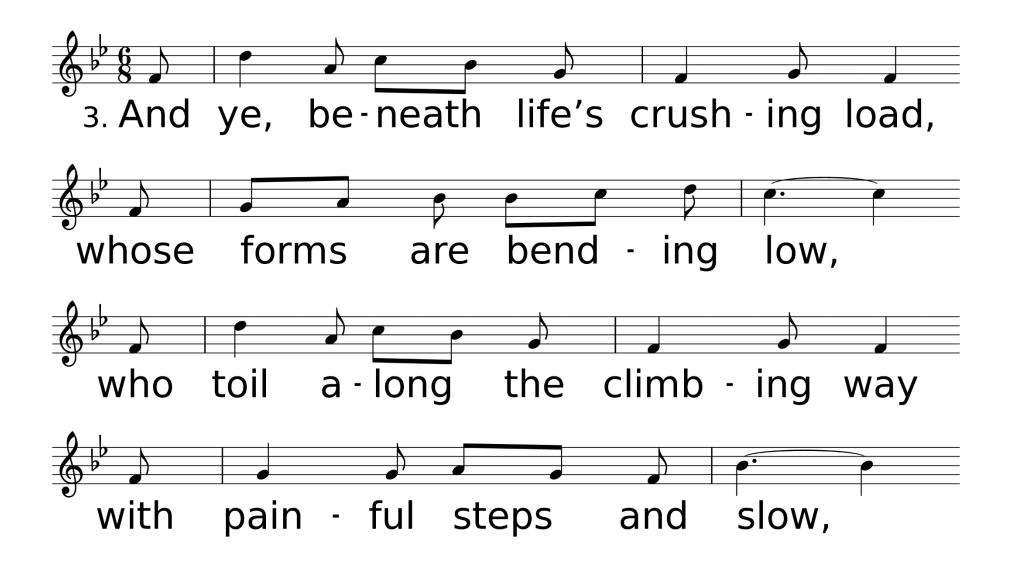
# Congregation: Lord, hear our prayer.

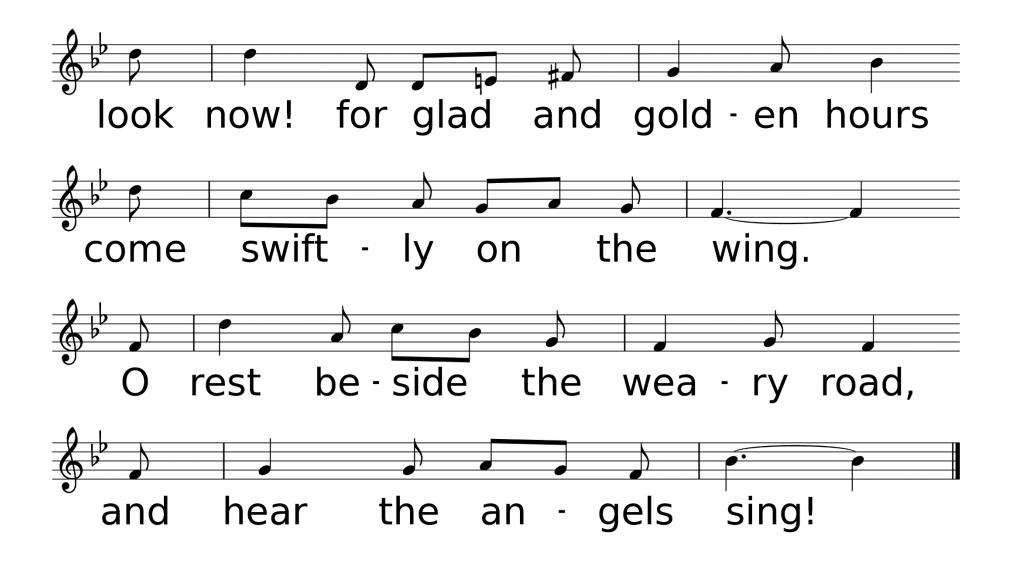
### \*Hymn It Came Upon a Midnight Clear UMH #218, v 1, 3 & 4

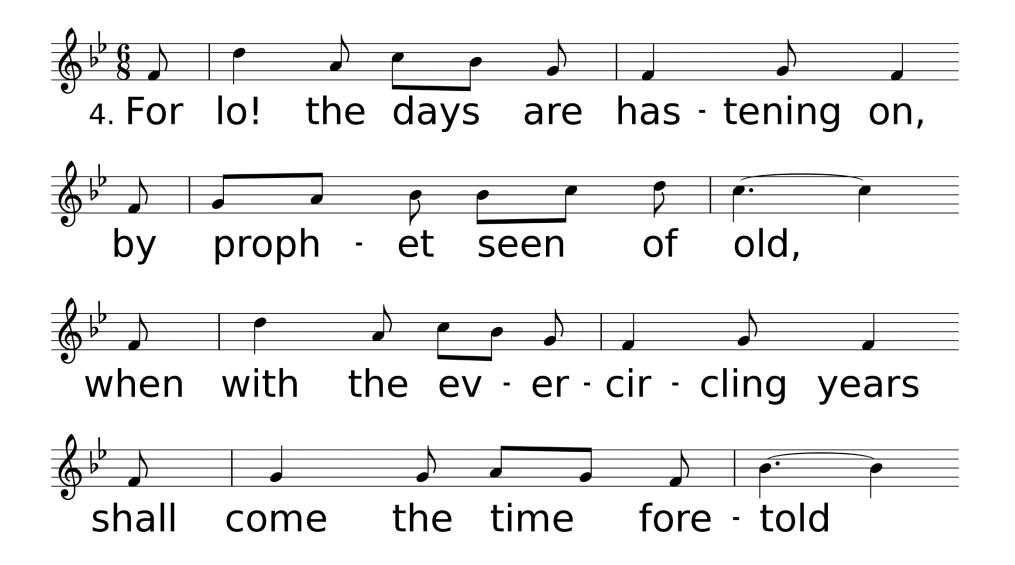
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### Fourth Reading Luke 2:1-7

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

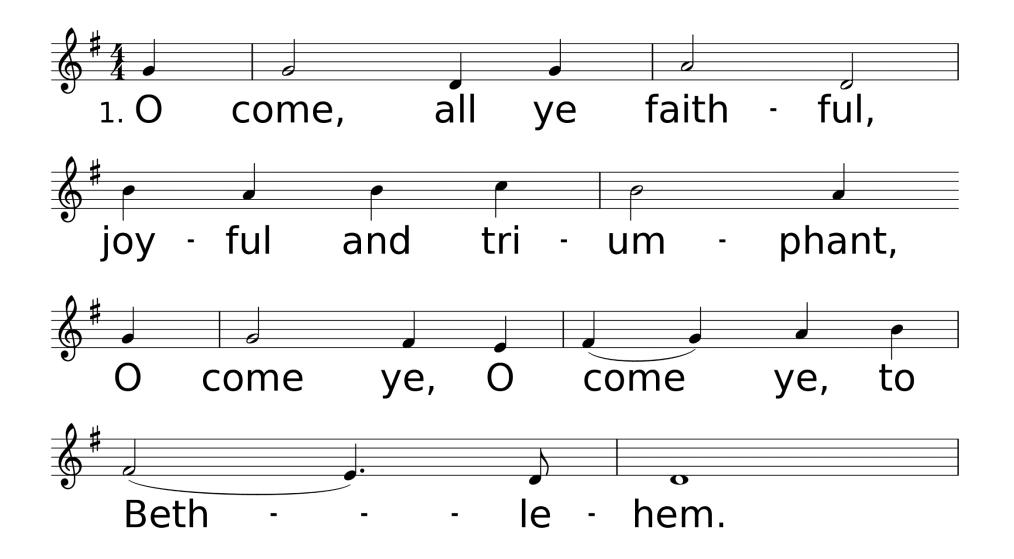
# Devotional

#### Psalm 121

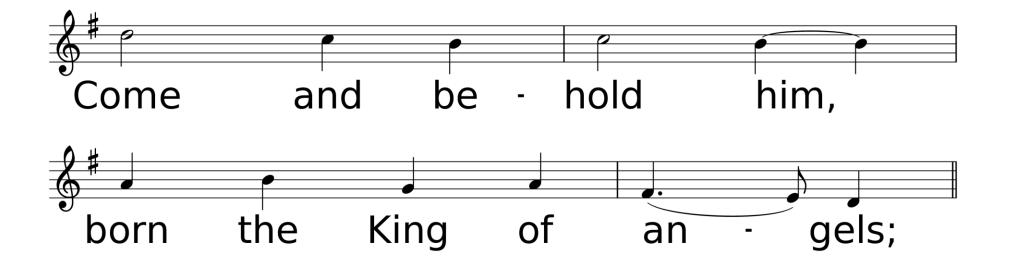
I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from where comes my help. My help comes from the Lord, who has made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved; he that keeps us will not slumber; behold, the God that keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is our keeper; the Lord is my shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not defeat me by day nor the moon at night. The Lord shall preserve me from all evil and shall sustain my soul. He shall preserve my going out and my coming in, from this time forth and forevermore.

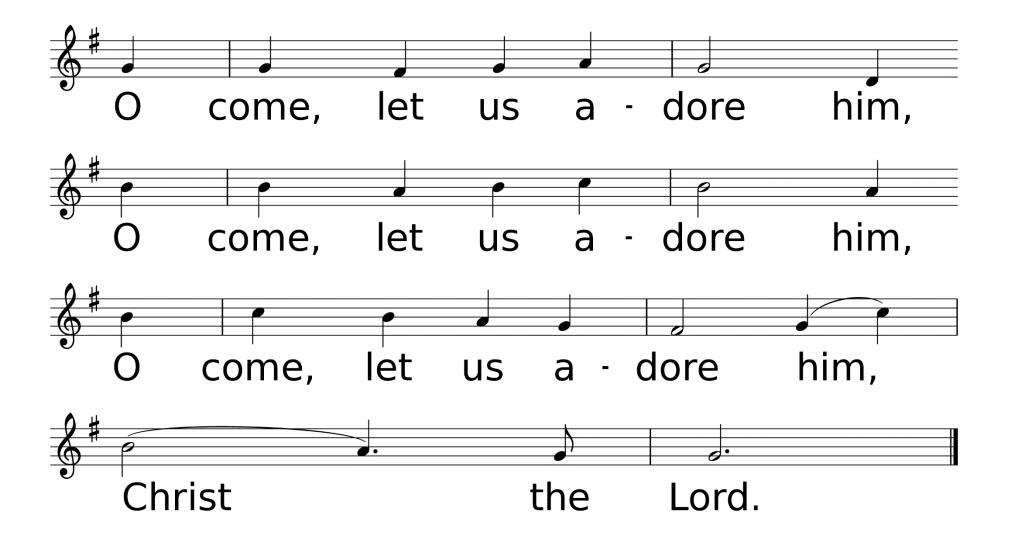
# \*Hymn Ocone, All Ye Faithful UMH #234, v 1-3

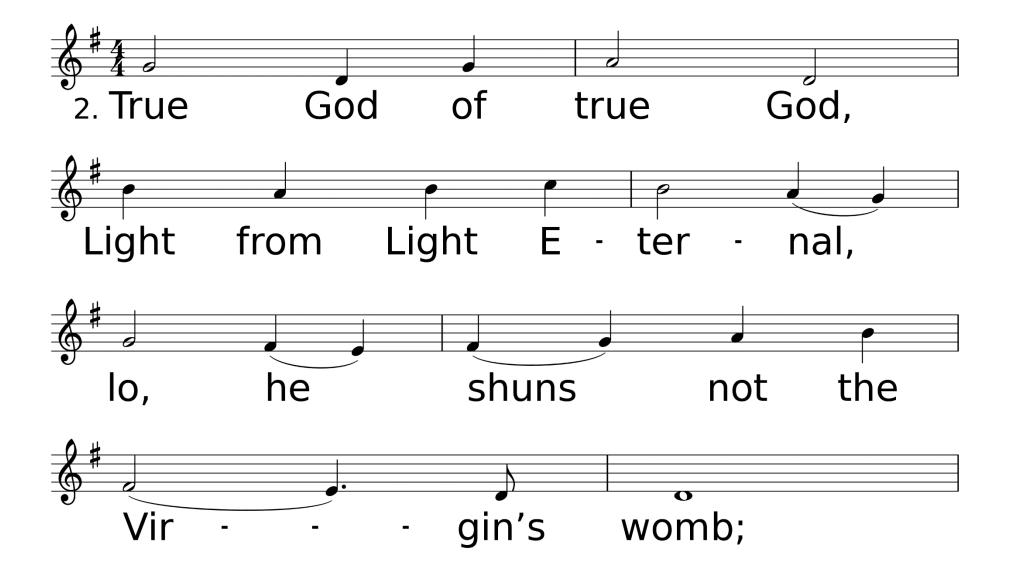
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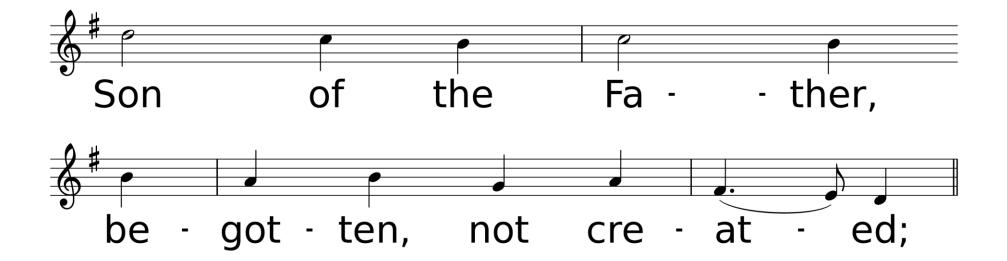


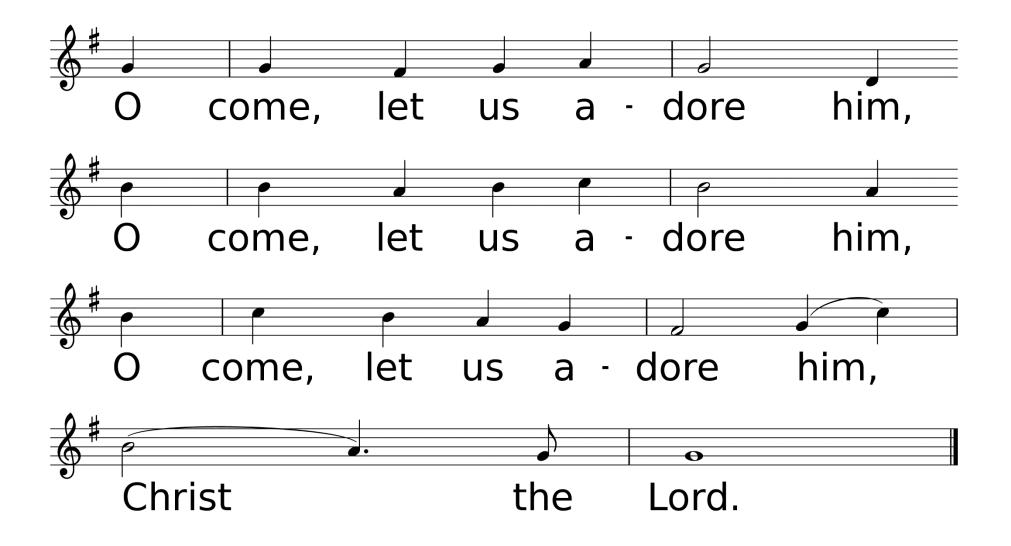
WORDS: John F. Wade, ca. 1743; trans. by Frederick Oakeley, 1841, and others MUSIC (ADESTES FIDELES, Irr.): John F. Wade, ca. 1743; harm. from Collections of Motetts or Antiphons, 1792

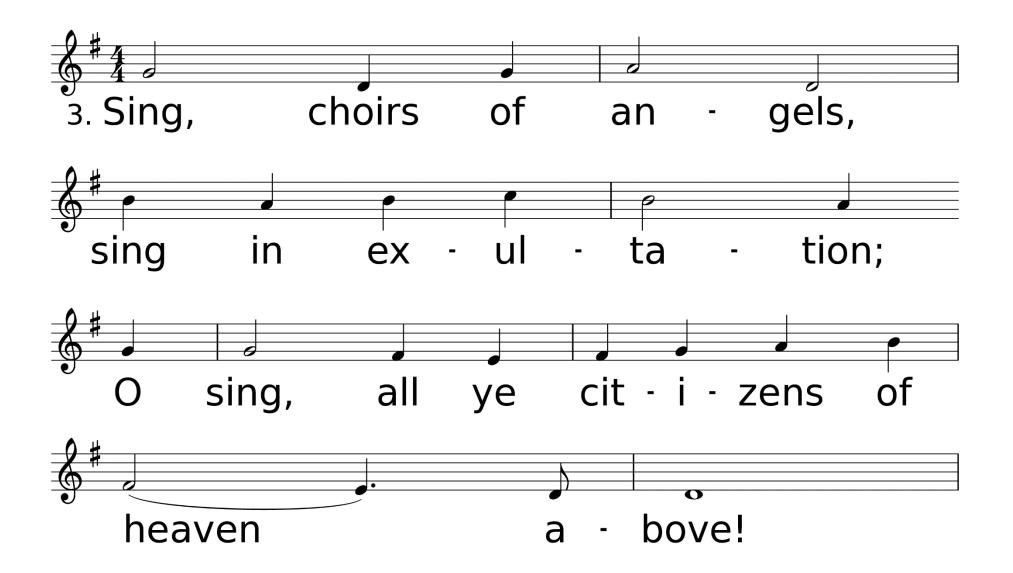


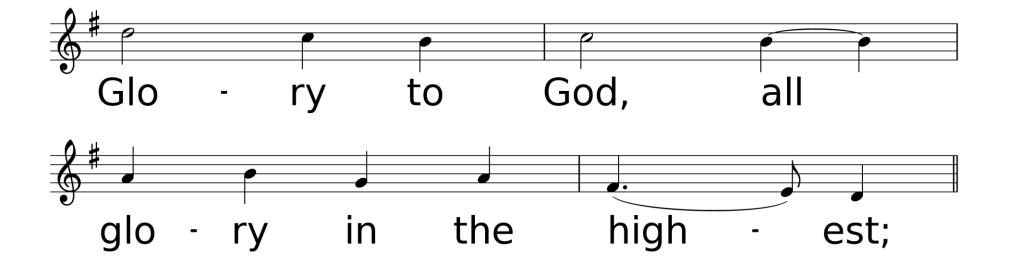


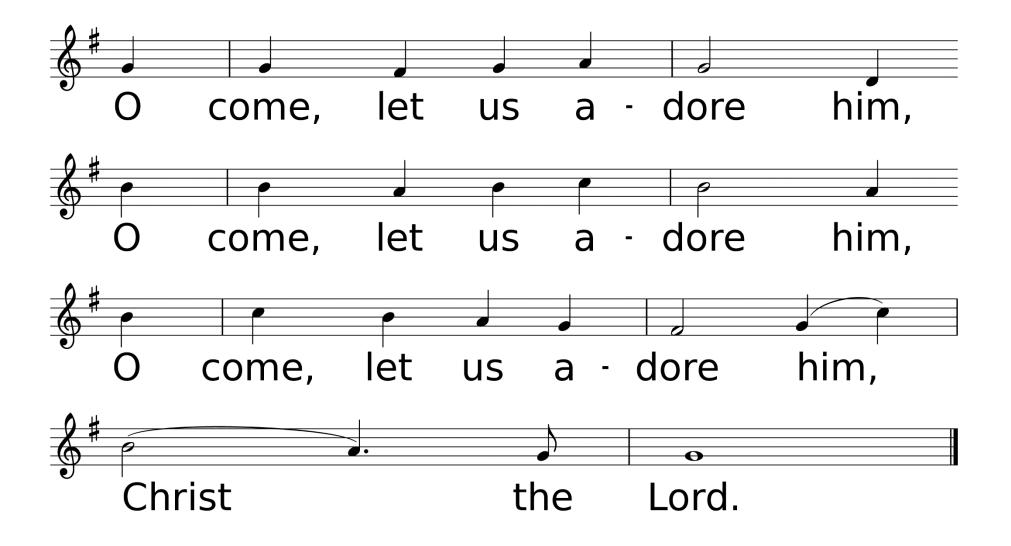












## \*Prayer

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 rest peacefully. 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.

## \*Blessing & Dismissal

Thank you for Joining us. We invite you to attend our other Special Christmas Services this holiday season:

> 4th Sunday of Advent Service Sunday, December 24th at 10:00 AM Sanctuary & Online

Christmas Eve Candlelight & Communion Service Sunday, December 24th at 5:30 PM Sanctuary & Online

Merry Christmas!