Valley Community

The Longest Night
Sunday, December 21, 2025

GATHERING US IN

PRELUDE

Gesú Bambino
Pietro A.Yon
Jane Nienaber, organ

Of the Father's Love Begotten
arr. T. Frederick Candlyn

I Wonder as I Wander
Arr. Rhett Barnwell
Lisa Beckstrom, harp

WELCOME

Rev. Jim Cochrane

MUSICAL REFLECTION

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming
Daniel Kantor
Valley Handbell Choir

LIGHTING THE ADVENT CANDLES

One: *Even through our longest nights, in the dark moments when light seems like nothing but a distant memory,*

All: ***We keep vigil.***

One: *...We light the candle of hope as we await the coming of Jesus, our source of hope.*

All: ***Thank you, Lord, for the gift of hope in our times of emptiness and despair.***

One: *...We light the candle of peace as we await the time when all of creation will be made whole again.*

All: ***Thank you, Lord, for the gift of peace in our times of uncertainty and fear.***

One: *...We light the candle of joy, knowing that our comfort and help come from God, and we will be led into the world of life.*

All: ***Thank you, Lord, for the gift of joy-filled memories and your abiding presence in our times of sadness.***

One: *...We light the candle of love, knowing that God is love revealed to us in Jesus Christ.*

All: ***Thank you, Lord, for the gift of love in our times of longing and loneliness.***

One: *On this night, when shadows lengthen and we are surrounded by darkness, let us keep vigil, for God is surely with us.*

t Hymn #144 ***In the Bleak Midwinter*** *vss. 1, 2, 4*

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan;
earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,
in the bleak midwinter, long ago.

Our God, heaven cannot hold him, nor earth sustain;
heaven and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign:
in the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed
the Lord God incarnate, Jesus Christ.

What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
if I were a wise man, I would do my part;
yet what I can I give him: give my heart.

LISTENING FOR GOD'S PROMISE

-Loss-

A SCRIPTURE READING Isaiah 40:1; 3-11

PRAYER

Hymn #88 ***O Come, O Come Emmanuel*** (vs. 1)

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.

SILENT REFLECTION

-Healing-

A SCRIPTURE READING Psalm 139:1-2, 7-12

PRAYER

Hymn #88 ***O Come, O Come Emmanuel*** (vs. 6)

O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer our spirits by thine 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.

SILENT REFLECTION

-Hope-

A SCRIPTURE READING John 14:1-4, 18-19

PRAYER

MUSICAL REFLECTION *Silent Night*
Arr. by Rhett Barnwell

REMEMBERING GOD'S PROMISE

CANDLE LIGHTING

One: Tonight, we light a candle in memory of those who gave us birth, who nurtured us, offered love, and cherished us.

All: We remember mothers and fathers, guardians and grandparents, and all our family through the ages.

One: One: We light a candle in memory of those who have joined us in the great circle of family.

All: We remember sisters and brothers, aunts, uncles, and cousins, those near to us and far away.

One: One: We light a candle in memory of those whom we came to know through the eyes of love. We hold sacred the faces and memories of years past, of those who brightened our days and lit up our lives.

All: We remember husbands and wives, dearest loves and closest friends, who changed our lives forever.

One: One: We light a candle in memory of those who have shared in our lives in countless ways, who made our lives more enjoyable.

All: We remember friends and neighbors, those close by, and those far away.

One: We light a candle for those we do not know, O God, who, like us, have suffered loss, who live with grief, who long for peace and justice, who long for friendship and healing.

All: We remember your people, of every time and place.

All are invited to come forward as music plays to light a candle in remembrance of those memories that weigh on our hearts this Advent season.

MUSICAL REFLECTION *Ave Maria*
Franz Schubert;
arr. M. Spasinovici & R. Moisanu

PRAYER

God of our joy and God of our weariness, we have brought our worn-down hearts to you this night—hearts full of grief, hearts carrying fear, hearts tender to the touch. We have brought our weariness to you this night because we know that you are present with us in the valleys. We know that you were born into a quiet night like this one, so surely our tears from the night are not unfamiliar to you.

Therefore, as we prepare to leave the safe protection of this sanctuary, we ask that you would continue to walk with us. Stay by our side through the valleys. Stay by our side as we climb our way out. Stay close we pray. For we cannot move from weariness to joy without you. With honesty and gratitude, we give you these prayers of our hearts—those named and left unnamed. We give them all to you. Amen.

RETURNING TO THE WORLD

t Hymn #291 ***Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness*** vss. 1, 3, 4

Refrain:

Spirit, spirit of gentleness, blow through the wilderness, calling and free.
Spirit, spirit of restlessness, stir me from placidness,
wind, wind on the sea.

You moved on the waters; you called to the deep;
then you coaxed up the mountains from the valleys of sleep;
and over the eons you called to each thing,
"Awake from your slumbers and rise on your wings." (**Refrain**)

You sang in a stable; you cried from a hill;
then you whispered in silence when the whole world was still.
And down in the city, you called once again
when you blew through your people on the rush of the wind. (**Refrain**)

You call from tomorrow; you break ancient schemes;
from the bondage of sorrow the captives dream dreams.
Our women see visions; our men clear their eyes.
With bold new decisions your people arise. (**Refrain**)

BENEDICTION

SENDING MUSIC *Still, Still, Still*
arr. Paul Manz

The sanctuary is available for individual prayer following the service. All are asked to leave the space quietly out of respect for those who would like to pray.

POETRY FROM TONIGHT'S SERVICE

"The Peace of Wild Things" by Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me / and I wake in the night at the least sound in fear of what my life and my children's lives might be, / I go and lie down where the wood drake / rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things / who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief. I come into the presence of still water. / And I feel above me the day-blind stars / waiting with their light. For a time / I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

"Psalm of Lament #27" by Ann Weems

O God of my heart, it is your name I call when the stars do not come out. / O God of my soul, it is to you I turn when the torrents of terror drown me. / O God of mercy, it is for your hand I reach when I stumble on the stones of sorrow. / O God of justice, it is to you I cry when the landslide of grief buries me. / I stand beneath the night where the stars used to shine and remember gazing mesmerized at the luminaries of the sky until I could walk the ink-blue beach between their shining. / Then their shining stopped, for they left the sky, and you, O God, left with them. / And I am left alone beneath a starless sky with a starless heart that barely beats. / Will your stars never shine again? / Will they never again speak of your mystery? / Will they never again sing their songs to my soul? / Will I never again know the wonder of the God of star and sky? / O God of my heart, peel back the night and let the starlight pour out upon my upturned face. / Let my eyes drink a sky of stars. / Let my heart bathe in the stunning light until my soul sings again with the conviction of the faithful. / In your mercy and justice, O God of my heart, call me by name, and the stars will shine once more, As they did on that morning when they first began to sing.

"Go to the Limits of Your Longing" by Rainer Maria Rilke

God speaks to each of us as he makes us, then walks with us silently out of the night. / These are the words we dimly hear: You, sent out beyond your recall, go to the limits of your longing. Embody me. / Flare up like a flame and make big shadows I can move in. / Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror. Just keep going. No feeling is final. Don't let yourself lose me. / Nearby is the country they call life. You will know it by its seriousness. Give me your hand.

"every time i ever said i want to die" by Andrea Gibson

A difficult life is not less worth living than a gentle one. Joy is simply easier to carry than sorrow. And your heart could lift a city from how long you've spent holding what's been nearly impossible to hold. / This world needs those who know how to do that. Those who could find a tunnel that has no light at the end of it, and hold it up like a telescope to know the darkness also contains truths that could bring the light to its knees. / Grief astronomer, adjust the lens, look close, tell us what you see.

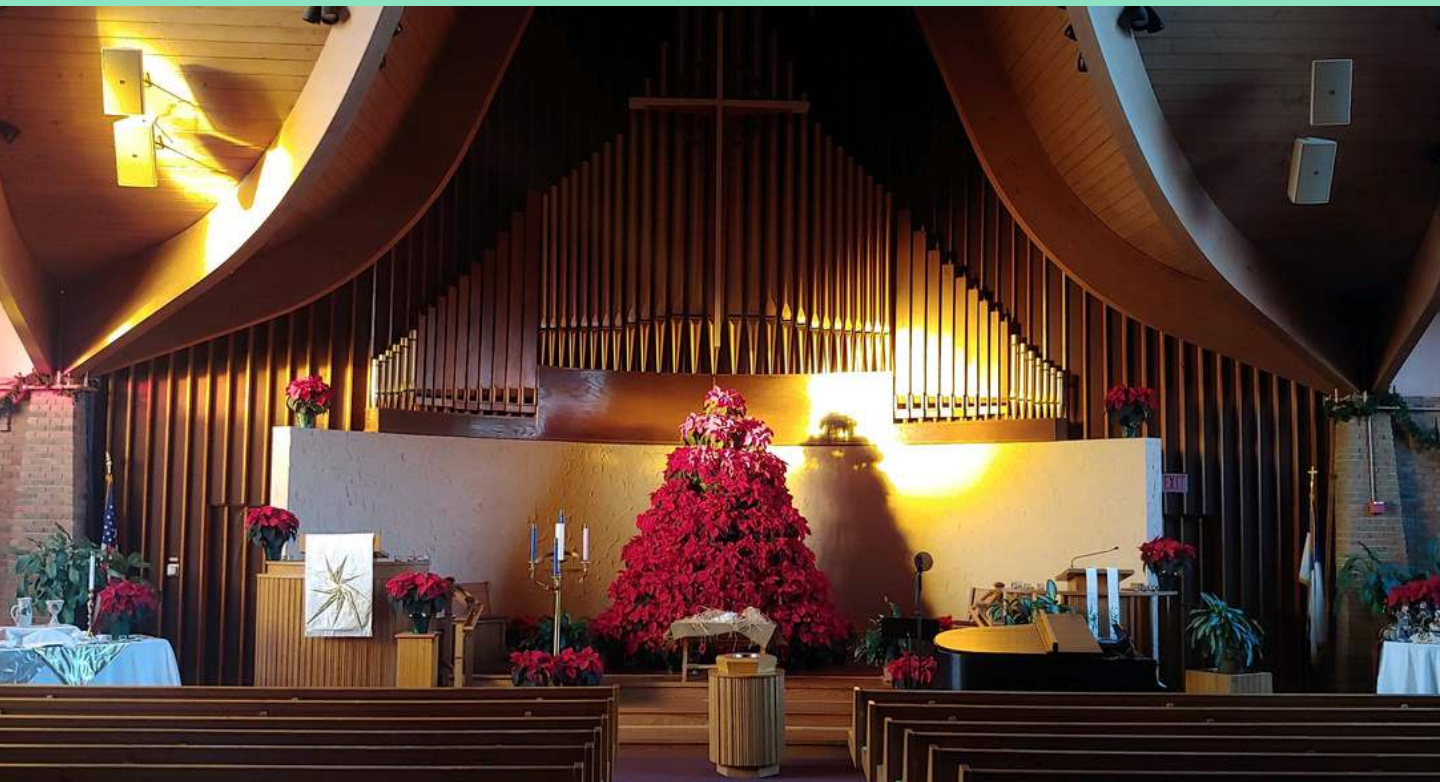
Christmas Services

LIVE-STREAM & IN-PERSON

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2025

4:30 PM Christmas Eve Family Service
(music starts at 4:15 pm)

9:30 PM Christmas Eve Candlelight Service
with communion



Valley Community

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Open Hearts • Open Minds • Opening Lives to God

—Established May 20, 1951—

Land Acknowledgement Statement

Valley Community Presbyterian Church sits on the ancestral and contemporary land of the Dakota people, for whom the land holds historical, spiritual, political, and cultural significance.

We acknowledge the ongoing injustices that we have committed against the Dakota people and pledge to interrupt this legacy. We will educate ourselves about Indigenous history and recognize, support, and advocate for our Native neighbors.

LOGO DESIGN BY WÓOKIYE WIŊ (SISSETON WAHPETON DAKHÓTA AND OJIBWAY)

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