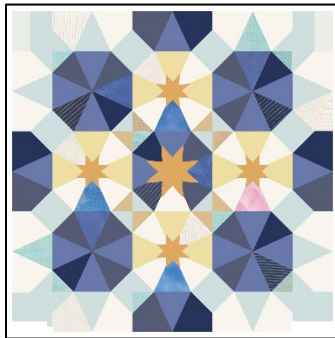


# WELCOME TO THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF BIG FLATS

## Longest Night Service

December 21, 2024 at 6:30 PM



### ***FOR ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS***

Wherever you may find yourself-  
on the edge of a sunset, on the beams of a sunrise,  
Balance is knowing when to hold on, and when to let go.

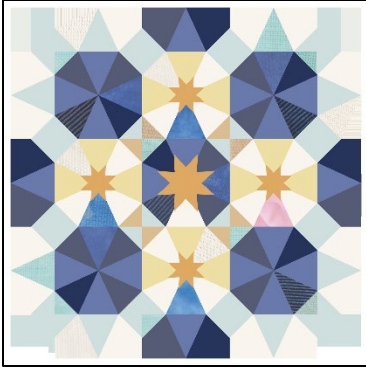
What ends, be it painfully or peacefully,  
is just a preparation for something new; a rebirth,  
The magical seeds of a fresh perspective coming forth.

We are all a story of endings and beginnings;  
A complexion of ego and soul, love and pain,  
flowers and vines, fire and water, earth and air.

So don't fear what falls away.  
Beyond, in unseen places from far out traces,  
There is something more wondrous  
in preparation to come your way.

Darling one,  
The heartbeat, the destiny of a new beginning  
is far too enticing to ever fear an ending"

- Christine Evangelou<sup>1</sup>



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***FOR ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS***<sup>ii</sup>

**\* GATHERING HYMN**     *O Little Town of Bethlehem* GTG #121, v. 1,3,4

1 O little town of Bethlehem,  
how still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
the silent stars go by.  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth  
the everlasting light;  
the hopes and fears of all the years  
are met in thee tonight.

3 How silently, how silently,  
the wondrous gift is given!  
So God imparts to human hearts  
the blessings of his heaven.  
No ear may hear his coming,  
but in this world of sin,  
where meek souls will receive him, still  
the dear Christ enters in.

4 O holy child of Bethlehem,  
descend to us, we pray;  
cast out our sin and enter in;  
be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels  
the great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us; abide with us,  
our Lord Emmanuel!

**WELCOME & PASSING THE PEACE**

*\* When directed, share a word or sign of peace with those near you.*

May the peace of Christ be with you.

**And also with you.**

## OPENING MEDITATION & CANDLE LIGHTING

Even in our endings,

**fill us with hope for new beginnings.**

Even as our minds race with anxiety,

**fill us with peace that surpasses understanding.**

Even in our deepest grief,

**fill us with joy and laughter.**

Even in a world of hate and fear,

**fill us with your love, O God.**

Come, let us worship Emmanuel, God with us.

**HYMN:**            *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*

GTG #465

1 What a friend we have in Jesus,  
all our sins and griefs to bear!

What a privilege to carry  
everything to God in prayer!

O what peace we often forfeit;  
O what needless pain we bear,  
all because we do not carry  
everything to God in prayer!

2 Have we trials and temptations?  
Is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged;  
take it to the Lord in prayer!

Can we find a friend so faithful  
who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness;  
take it to the Lord in prayer!

3 Are we weak and heavy laden,  
cumbered with a load of care?  
Precious Savior, still our refuge;  
take it to the Lord in prayer!  
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?  
Take it to the Lord in prayer!  
In his arms he'll take and shield thee;  
thou wilt find a solace there

**SCRIPTURE READING | ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8**    Pew Bible, OT, pg. 616

<sup>1</sup> 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.

## **TIME OF REFLECTION & SILENT PRAYER**

**HYMN:**                    *Wait for the Lord*

(Wait for the Lord, His day is near)

(Wait for the Lord, be strong, take heart)

(Wait for the Lord, His day is near)

(Wait for the Lord, be strong, take heart)

Prepare the way for the Lord

Make a straight path for Him

(Wait for the Lord, His day is near)

(Wait for the Lord, be strong, take heart)

The Glory of the Lord shall be revealed

(Wait for the Lord, His day is near)

(Wait for the Lord, be strong, take heart)

Seek first the Kingdom of God

Seek and you shall find

(Wait for the Lord, His day is near)

(Wait for the Lord, be strong, take heart)

Oh, Lord, show us Your way

Guide us in Your truth

(Wait for the Lord, His day is near)

(Wait for the Lord, be strong, take heart)

## PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Holy God, we turn to you in each season of our lives.

For the seasons in our past that brought us joy, the seasons we deeply miss with longing in our hearts, God, we offer our gratitude. May our memories be sources of comfort rather than pain.

For the seasons in our past that are tender and painful, we ask your healing, O God. Liberate our hearts, minds, and spirits from trauma, and let us bury what must be buried.

For new beginnings that fill us with excitement, we give you praise. May we step into these new seasons with grace.

For changing seasons that bring anxiety for what the future may hold, we ask your peace. Fill us with hope, and help us navigate the way forward.

God, we come before you now with full hearts, offering you every part of ourselves: our grief, our pain, our joy, our anxiety, our gratitude. God, we bring it all.

As we bring these prayers forward to the Communion Table, in words and in candles lit in honor of the prayers too deep for words, we ask that you receive them, hold them, and answer them in your wisdom.

Gratefully we pray, amen.

I now invite you to bring your prayers to the Table. There are slips of paper and writing utensils in your seat for any prayers you would like to put in words. The ministers will collect these prayers at the end of our service and pray for them this week. If you are joining us online, I invite you to type your prayers into the chat.

For prayers that are too deep for words, or for prayers that you prefer to keep in your heart alone, we invite you to light a candle. We will hold each of these prayers, too, trusting that God knows the depths of our hearts.

*Take a few moments to write your prayers and bring them forward and place them in the Offering Plate on the Communion Table.*

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayers. Amen.**

**HYMN:***Wait for the Lord*

Refrain x2

(Wait for the Lord, His day is near)

(Wait for the Lord, be strong, take heart)

(Wait for the Lord, His day is near)

(Wait for the Lord, be strong, take heart)

(Wait for the Lord, His day is near)

(Wait for the Lord, be strong, take heart)

(Wait for the Lord, His day is near)

(Wait for the Lord, be strong, take heart)

**SCRIPTURE READING | ISAIAH 43:16-21**

<sup>16</sup> Thus says the LORD,  
 who makes a way in the sea,  
 a path in the mighty waters,  
<sup>17</sup> who brings out chariot and horse,  
 army and warrior;  
 they lie down, they cannot rise,  
 they are extinguished, quenched like  
 a wick:

<sup>18</sup> Do not remember the former  
 things,  
 or consider the things of old.

<sup>19</sup> I am about to do a new thing;

Pew Bible, OT, pg. 672-673  
 now it springs forth, do you not  
 perceive it?

I will make a way in the wilderness  
 and rivers in the desert.

<sup>20</sup> The wild animals will honor me,  
 the jackals and the ostriches;  
 for I give water in the wilderness,  
 rivers in the desert,

to give drink to my chosen people,  
<sup>21</sup> the people whom I formed for  
 myself

so that they might declare my praise.

**WORDS OF COMFORT / AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

The first words of Genesis tell us that in the beginning, God was creating.  
 We believe in a God who is at work in all our beginnings.

In Revelation, we hear Jesus proclaim, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the  
 First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."

We believe in a Savior who is with us through it all,

**in every beginning, and in every ending that comes before.**

And so from beginning to end, from Genesis to Revelation, from the first day to  
 the last, we are held by our God who knows our name.

**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

**\* CLOSING HYMN:**                    *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*                    GTG # 88, v1  
1 O come, O come, Emmanuel,                    Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
and ransom captive Israel,                    shall come to thee, O Israel.  
that mourns in lonely exile here  
until the Son of God appear.

**\* BENEDICTION<sup>iii</sup>**

As you leave this place,  
may you have the wisdom to lean on one other. May you have the courage  
to hold onto hope,  
the compassion to do the good that is yours to do,  
and the confidence to trust that God sees you as a blessing. For in a world  
full of dead ends,  
Advent invites us to begin again. So start here.  
Start now.  
Start with love and begin again. In the name of Christ,  
our new beginning, go in peace.

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**PLEASE JOIN US FOR...**

**SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP**  
**December 22, 2024 at 10:30 AM**

**COMMUNITY CAROL SING AT NORTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
**DECEMBER 22<sup>ND</sup> AT 2 P.M.**

We will be participating in a *Community Carol Sing* at North Presbyterian Church in Elmira  
with First Presbyterian Church of Elmira, First Presbyterian Church of Horseheads and North  
Presbyterian Church.

**CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP**  
**December 24<sup>th</sup> at 6 p.m.**

Please join us for our Communion and Candlelight Service.  
This service will also be livestreamed.

# FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF BIG FLATS, NEW YORK

Pastor, Rev. Denise Stone

Director of Music, Valerie Stone

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Church Website: [www.bigflatsfirstpres.org](http://www.bigflatsfirstpres.org)

Facebook Page (*live & recorded Services*):

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100077238740796>

CCLL License Numbers: for music – 20207114; for streaming – 20207121. OneLicense Number: A-738210.

*O Little Town of Bethlehem*

Author: Phillips Brooks (1868)

Tune Information Title: ST. LOUIS (Redner)

Composer: Lewis H. Redner (1868)

Copyright: Public Domain

*What a Friend We Have in Jesus*

Author: Joseph Medlicott Scriven (1855)

Tune Information Title: CONVERSE (Converse)

Composer: Charles C. Converse (1868)

Copyright: Public Domain

*Wait for the Lord*

Author: Communauté de Taizé

Copyright: © 1991 Ateliers et Presses de Taize, Taize Community, France, GIA Publications, Inc., exclusive North American agent (author)

Tune Information Title: WAIT FOR THE LORD

Composer: Jacques Berthier

Copyright: © 1984, Les Presses de Taizé, GIA Publications, Inc. agent

*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*

Latin Title: Veni, veni Emmanuel

Translator: J. M. Neale (1851)

Tune Information Title: VENI EMMANUEL (Chant)

Composer: Anonymous

Adapter: Thom-as Hel-more

Arranger: John Weaver

Copyright: Public Domain

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/chrissiesvoice/posts/new-poem-endings-and-beginnings-the-motivation-angel-christine-evangelou-2022-ther/1202049877234097/>.  
[themotivationangel.co.uk](http://themotivationangel.co.uk).

<sup>ii</sup> "Liturgy by Rev. Anna Strickland | A Sanctified Art LLC | [sanctifiedart.org](http://sanctifiedart.org)."

<sup>iii</sup> This benediction is by Rev. Sarah Speed from the *Words for the Beginning* Words for Worship.