

# WATCH NIGHT VESPERS



December 31, 2020



## ENTRANCE OF THE LIGHT

*Light a candle on the screen.*  
Light and peace in Jesus Christ!

**Thanks be to God!**

'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." (Revelation 1:8)

**Alleluia!!**

## EVENING HYMN

"All Praise to Thee, My God, This Night" UMH #682.

See hymn on p. 83, "Watch Night Song."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JG-8k8ikaj4>

**1. Glory to Thee, my God, this night,  
For all the blessings of the light!  
Keep me, O keep me, King of kings,  
Beneath Thine own almighty wings.**

**2. Forgive me, Lord, for Thy dear Son,  
The ill that I this day have done,  
That with the world, myself, and Thee,  
I, ere I sleep, at peace may be.**

**3. Teach me to live, that I may dread  
The grave as little as my bed.  
Teach me to die, that so I may  
Triumphing rise at the day.**

**4. O may my soul on Thee repose,  
And with sweet sleep mine eyelids close,  
Sleep that may me more vigorous make  
To serve my God when I awake**

**5. Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow;  
Praise Him, all creatures here below;  
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.**

## THANKSGIVING FOR LIGHT

Blessed are you, Holy God! When you said:  
"Let there be light" there was light and it was good.  
When your people fled from oppression, You led  
them with a pillar of fire. In Jesus Christ, your light  
shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot  
overcome it. Blessed are you, God of light!  
Shine in our lives with the light of Christ that we  
might give you praise through him who lives and  
reigns with you and Holy Spirit, now and forever.  
Amen.

## CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE

As generations of our mothers and fathers have done, we come before the throne of grace in the assurance of God's great mercy as we confess our sins. Let us pray... Lord, we confess our day to day failure to be truly human.

**Lord, we confess to you.**

Lord, we confess that we often fail to love with all we have and are, often because we do not fully understand what loving means, often because we are afraid of risking ourselves.

**Lord, we confess to you.**

Lord, we cut ourselves off from each other and we erect barriers of division.

**Lord, we confess to you.**

Lord, we confess that by silence and ill-considered word

**we have built up wall of prejudice.**

Lord, we confess that by selfishness and lack of sympathy

**we have stifled generosity and left little time for others.**

Holy Spirit, speak to us. Help us listen to your word of forgiveness, for we are very deaf. Come, fill this moment, fill our new year, and free us from sin so the love of Christ can shine through us better.

## WORDS OF ASSURANCE:

God is making all things new. The past is over and done. It taught us many lessons. But God is the God of the future, new opportunities, new hopes, new dreams, renewed vision. God dwells with us to be our God. We are not alone. Thanks be to God. Amen.

## SCRIPTURE Jeremiah 29:1-14

The prophet Jeremiah sent a letter from Jerusalem to the few surviving elders among the exiles, to the priests and the prophets, and to all the people Nebuchadnezzar had taken to Babylon from Jerusalem. The letter was sent after King Jeconiah, the queen mother, the court officials, the government leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, and the craftsmen and smiths had left Jerusalem. It was delivered to Babylon by Elasah, Shaphan's son, and Gemariah, Hilkiyah's son—two men dispatched to Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar by King Zedekiah. The LORD of heavenly forces, the God of Israel, proclaims to all the exiles I have carried off from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and settle down; cultivate gardens and eat what they produce. Get married and have children; then help your sons find wives and your daughters find husbands in order that they

too may have children. Increase in number there so that you don't dwindle away. Promote the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because your future depends on its welfare. The LORD of heavenly forces, the God of Israel, proclaims: Don't let the prophets and diviners in your midst mislead you. Don't pay attention to your dreams. They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I didn't send them, declares the LORD. The LORD proclaims: When Babylon's seventy years are up, I will come and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. I know the plans I have in mind for you, declares the LORD; they are plans for peace, not disaster, to give you a future filled with hope. When you call me and come and pray to me, I will listen to you. When you search for me, yes, search for me with all your heart, you will find me. I will be present for you, declares the LORD, and I will end your captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have scattered you, and I will bring you home after your long exile, declares the LORD.

*A time of silent meditation*

*Meditate on the disasters of this past year. God is not through with us yet. God has a plan for us, filled with peace and a future filled with hope. Take the time to pray, to share your heart with God. May you find him tonight in the quiet of your home.*

#### PASTORAL PRAYER

**Creative God, you make all things new in heaven and on earth. We come to you in a new year with new desires and old fears, new decisions and old controversies, new dreams and old weaknesses. Because you are a God of hope, we know that you create all the possibilities of the future. Because you are a God of love, we know that you accept all the mistakes of the past. Because you are the God of our faith, we enter your gates with thanksgiving and praise, and come into your presence with gladness and a joyful noise, and we serve and bless you. Amen.**

#### HOMILY

Bishop Peggy Johnson

presiding Bishop of the Eastern Pennsylvania  
Conference of the United Methodist Church

#### PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION

Everlasting Lord, we are grateful and hushed by the mystery of existence as we stand on the threshold of a new year. We marvel in your love and gracious purpose woven into the fabric of our days. With confidence born of your faithfulness we offer our hopes and prayers: for ourselves and all most dear to us ...

*(pause)*

for the world, its peoples and its leaders . . . *(pause)*

for the mission and faithfulness of the Church here and everywhere . . . *(pause)*.

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings, with your most gracious favor, and further us with your continual help, that in all our works, begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy name, and finally, by your mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray:

#### THE LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.**

#### VOW OF COMMITMENT

**This evening on the eve of a New Year, we recommit ourselves to our lives with Christ: a life of compassion, community-building, and caring for our children, youth, young adults, and adults. Standing watch as stewards of God's creation and God's church, we are blessed by God's tremendous generosity and know that with these gifts comes a great deal of responsibility. In the name of Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we stand to renew the vows we made to the Lord during our baptism. As we launch into a New Year, we are open to God's call and leading. We pledge to embrace the preached word, to teach through our lived example, and to listen for the majestic beauty of God in all creation. As we glimpse into the New Year, we fret not about the past, nor will we obsess about the future. We pray to learn from our past mistakes and to have an attitude of gratitude in the present that we might fully experience God's grace, moment by moment. Knowing that God will never leave us or forsake us, we will work to live each day as it comes, knowing that we are building on the past and building for the future, by God's grace, not worrying about either. With the gift of the New Year is another opportunity for us to be the eyes and ears of God, for us to watch for those who yet need to hear the words of love and salvation and to listen that we might learn how to minister in each unique situation. With this Watch Night, service, we praise and glorify the God of past, present, and future, so blessed to be alive to see another year.**

#### UMC WORLD MASS CHOIR CHRISTMAS CAROL MEDLEY

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/christmaschoir>

#### ASCRPTION OF PRAISE Jude 24-25

Now to the One who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forevermore.

#### BLESSING

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. *(2 Corinthians 13:14)*

**Thanks be to God!**

## More Resources for Watchnight Observance

- An explanation of the history of Watch Night <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a99fa3436099bb6a695d86a/t/5fd2c8cd26fa4758b5a38476/1607649485892/Watch+Night+Article+by+Encyclopedia+Britannica.pdf>

-An explanation of Freedom's Eve

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a99fa3436099bb6a695d86a/t/5fceffbfbaf0bc04d1c1d36c/1607401403931/The+Black+Experience+%E2%80%A2+Moments+and+Movements.pdf>

- Freedom's Eve • The Black Experience: Moments and Movements with Professor Dr. John W. Kinney (video that accompanies the explanation above)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K0tCfv1uLP8&feature=youtu.be>

### *Poem of Reflection*

#### *WATCH NIGHT: REFLECTING, PRAYING FORWARD*

*Between evening and midnight  
Before the dawn of a new day  
We watch by night  
Awaiting the coming of a year  
Never experienced before;  
Of time untested, unborn  
Due to burst forth in moments  
As we pray and wait  
On the Lord,  
As we experience renewal of courage;  
Yes, We wait on God.*

*Standing watch by night  
Before the break of day  
Time for reflecting  
Giving thanks, breathing deeply  
By God's grace, we did get over  
The damage we did in the year past  
We pray we didn't do too much harm;  
We ask forgiveness for the wrongs we committed  
Praying for healing of ourselves and those we wronged.  
Reflecting, looking back, in gratitude.*

*Praying forward, we stand on the firm foundation  
Of the loving mercy of God  
Gifted to yet be alive,  
Gifted to have an opportunity to serve  
In hope, faith, and anticipation,  
We have traversed mountains and valleys  
To stand on the brink of today:  
Happy New Year.*

\*See <http://www.greenspun.com/bboard/q-and-a-fetch-msg.tcl?msgid=ooBgLB>; Charyn D. Sutton, "Watch Night," The Onyx Group, December 2000