



MARKING THE LONGEST NIGHT OF THE YEAR THE WINTER SOLSTICE December 21, 2023

What is Winter Solstice? Why celebrate at a church?

In the northern hemisphere, the Winter solstice is the day of the year (December 21/22) when the Sun is farthest south, marking the first day of the season of winter. It is the shortest day of the solar year. For centuries in diverse cultures, it has been a moment marked with religious, philosophical and social implications. Out of the darkness of the longest day of the year, the light of the coming summer – and longer days – is reborn. It has long been observed as a moment of rebirth, renewal, and resurrection.

Learn more about the connection between Christmas, Saturnalia, and the Winter Solstice with a short video that we've created. This QR Code will redirect you to it on your smart device.



Walking the Labyrinth

The labyrinth is an ancient pattern found in many cultures around the world. They've been found on pottery, tablets and tiles that date back as far as 5,000 years.

One feature labyrinths have in common is that they have one path that winds in a circuitous way to the center. The way in is the way out. We utilize labyrinths as a guided prayer path of sorts. They are not mazes or puzzles that need to be solved. Rather, as we follow the path, we journey inward, praying along the way. At the center, we pause in the presence of God – giving, receiving, waiting. When a "sufficient" amount of time has passed, we journey back outward. All along the path, we might notice God is with us, in us and around us. This QR Code will redirect your smart device to a video explaining labyrinths.



Tonight, as we walk and pray the labyrinth we reflect on the way in which this moment in the year redefines our hopes, fears and outlook. The darkness and cold seem to be ever-growing, yet it's at this point that we begin to be closer to spring than winter. It's also the time when we celebrate Christmas – the story of the birth of a baby to poor parents that redefines our expectations of God and understandings of power.

In our community we're reflecting this year around the theme "How does a weary world rejoice?" It's taken from the lyrics of the Christmas Carol "O Holy Night." Today, in 2023, you may be – and we are as a society – weary. War in Gaza and Ukraine. Famine in Violence in our politics. Hate crimes. Increased poverty and isolation. How do we rejoice – and celebrate hope – when we're weary and worn-out?



Tonight, you're invited to to reflect on these verses from the book of Luke (often read in Churches at this time of year) and spend some time walking and praying on a labyrinth.

Begin by praying these words ...

- "Come, Lord Jesus ... "
- or "Breathe on me Breath of God"
- or "Light of the World shine upon me..."

repeat them a few times softly as a way to center yourself and calm your mind...

Center yourself around a living word:

Spend a few moments considering the verses from the song of hope sung by Zechariah – recorded in Luke 1. He spoke this word of protest-hope in a time of great weariness because of imperial powers, unfair economic systems privileging the rich, and following his own exclusion for not measuring up to society's norms.

- Where is their weariness from darkness or shadow in your life?
- How do you long for a light to dawn, to guide you in the way of peace?
- How are you possibly being called today, in this season, to stand for peace, inclusive light and hope for others?

Hold onto one of these thoughts and take it into the labyrinth with you ...

Walking the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Practice:

As you follow the path allow your thoughts to flow ...

When you get to the center pause in some time of prayer and reflection receiving God's love and blessing ...

When you are ready return along the same path, gratefully and prayerfully ...

When you leave the labyrinth you might like to write down a few words, symbols or phrases in a journal or on the back of this leaflet to acknowledge and remember this time of prayer. Take this leaflet home with you.

A reading from Scripture:

"Because of the tender loving-kindness of God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to shine upon those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Luke 1:78-79 (NRSV)

**CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS EVE WITH US
SUNDAY NIGHT AT 7:00PM IN PERSON & ONLINE**

CAROLS | CANDLES | INSTANT CHRISTMAS PAGEANT | CHOCOLATE



COLLEGE AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
5951 College Avenue, Oakland CA 94618
510 658-3665 | capcoakland.org