

New Year Taize Service
Compiled by Susanne Guenther Loewen
Dec. 31, 2023

Worship Leader: Susanne Guenther Loewen
Reader: Stephanie Epp
Music: Fern Stockdale
A/V: James & Dave

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Welcome, Land Acknowledgment, Announcements

Call to Worship for the New Year

The year has thinned
the light seems weaker
the year is tired
and the season running out

yet here we are
in the place of life
for this place believes
in things beyond time and season

we might live
in the echo of stables
and incarnation
holding onto faith in the year's last days

yet what do we do
but perform acts of renewal and rebirth
of baptism and hope
of seeking new life shaped in Jesus Christ

so let us gather in what the world sees
as the cusp of the year
yet we know as another day
in the eternity of love

and celebrate who we are
and who we are yet to be
come let us be together
and worship¹

Taize Song – StJ 59 – Come and Fill Our Hearts

Lighting the Peace Lamp At the Dawn of a New Year

At the dawn of a new year,
we come to welcome hope for a new world.

Let the darkness lift,
to welcome a dawn of plenty,
with enough for everyone
and people ready to share.

Let the day begin,
with new energy for the struggle
to protect our children
and to care for the vulnerable.

Let the light shine,
to open a path to safety
for all who are seeking home
and longing for life.

Let the sun rise
on new talks and new resolve
to end the bombing and the terror
and to find solutions that will last.

At the dawn of a new year
we come to declare our hope
and to welcome a new world.²

Joys & Concerns

Congregational Prayer

¹ written by Roddy Hamilton, and posted on **Listening to the Stones**.

<http://newkilpatrickblog.typepad.com/nk-blogging/mucky-paws/>

² written by Susan Durber, and posted on the Monthly Prayers page of the **Christian Aid** website.

<http://www.christianaid.org.uk/>

Hymn – New Earth, Heavens New – VT 377

Children's Time – Star Words or Darkness book

Readings - Introduction:

The ending of the old year and the beginning of the new reminds us of the cycles of creation and time, which are linked to the wisdom of spiritual cycles as well. As we go through life, there are experiences which affirm and buoy our spirits, but also those that challenge our beliefs, and those that make room for new understandings of the depths of faith. Medieval mystic Meister Eckhart spoke about these in beautifully evocative terms. For him, the spiritual life begins with **Creation** which he calls the Positive Way; then the season of **Letting Go & Letting Be** (the Negative Way); then the season of **Re-Creation & Transformation**, including the birth of the new self in God for the sake of living a life of compassion and social justice.³ Walter Brueggemann traces these same seasons in the book of Psalms, pointing out that all three are represented: the Psalms of Orientation, Psalms of Disorientation, and Psalms of Reorientation.⁴ Our readings and Taize songs of this part of the service will follow this cycle of three as well. As we read and sing, I invite you to apply this to your experience of the year that was: what are you called to celebrate and affirm of this past year? What are you called to let go of? What new creation or transformation might this coming year bring?

CREATION:

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for God has clothed me with the garments of salvation, God has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations. For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Beloved Is Where We Begin by Jan Richardson⁵

If you would enter
into the wilderness,
do not begin
without a blessing.

Do not leave
without hearing

³ Matthew Fox, *Meditations with Meister Eckhart* (Santa Fe, NM: Bear and Co., 1983), 4-5.

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 200?).

⁵ <https://paintedprayerbook.com/2016/02/11/lent-1-beloved-is-where-we-begin/>

who you are:
Beloved,
named by the One
who has traveled this path
before you.

Do not go
without letting it echo
in your ears,
and if you find
it is hard
to let it into your heart,
do not despair.
That is what
this journey is for.

I cannot promise
this blessing will free you
from danger,
from fear,
from hunger
or thirst,
from the scorching
of sun
or the fall
of the night.

But I can tell you
that on this path
there will be help.

I can tell you
that on this way
there will be rest.

I can tell you
that you will know
the strange graces
that come to our aid
only on a road
such as this,
that fly to meet us
bearing comfort
and strength,
that come alongside us
for no other cause

than to lean themselves
toward our ear
and with their
curious insistence
whisper our name:

Beloved.

Beloved.

Beloved.

Taize Song – HWB 348 – O Lord, Hear My Prayer

Readings – **LETTING GO & LETTING BE:**

From *Learning to Walk in the Dark* by Barbara Brown Taylor:

“Darkness” is shorthand for anything that scares me — that I want no part of — either because I am sure that I do not have the resources to survive it or because I do not want to find out. The absence of God is in there, along with the fear of dementia and the loss of those nearest and dearest to me. So is the melting of polar ice caps, the suffering of children, and the nagging question of what it will feel like to die. If I had my way, I would eliminate everything from chronic back pain to the fear of the devil from my life and the lives of those I love — if I could just find the right night-lights to leave on.

At least I think I would. The problem is this: when, despite all my best efforts, the lights have gone off in my life (literally or figuratively, take your pick), plunging me into the kind of darkness that turns my knees to water, nonetheless I have not died. ... Instead, I have learned things in the dark that I could never have learned in the light, things that have saved my life over and over again, so that there is really only one logical conclusion. I need darkness as much as I need light.

The problem is that there are so few people who can teach me about that. Most of the books on the New York Times “How-To” bestseller list are about how to avoid various kinds of darkness. ... I wish I could turn to the church for help, but so many congregations are preoccupied with keeping the lights on right now that the last thing they want to talk about is how to befriend the dark. ...

[This] can result in a kind of spirituality that deals with darkness by denying its existence or at least depriving it of any meaningful attention. I call it “full solar spirituality,” since it focuses on staying in the light of God around the clock, both absorbing and reflecting the sunny side of faith. You can usually recognize a full solar church by its emphasis on the benefits of faith, which include a sure sense of God’s presence, certainty of belief, divine guidance in all things, and reliable answers to prayer. Members strive to be positive in attitude, firm in conviction, helpful in relationship, and unwavering in faith. This sounds like heaven on earth. Who would not like to dwell in God’s light 24/7?

If you have ever belonged to such a community, however, you may have discovered that the trouble starts when darkness falls on your life, which can happen in any number of unsurprising ways: you lose your job, your marriage falls apart, your child acts out..., you pray hard for something that does not happen, you begin to doubt some of the things you have been taught about what the Bible says. The first time you speak of these things in a full solar church, you can usually get a hearing. Continue to speak of them and you may be reminded that God will not let you be tested beyond your strength. All that is required of you is to have faith. If you still do not get the message, sooner or later it will be made explicit for you: the darkness is your own fault, because you do not have enough faith.⁶

[So, we must ask,] “Who would stick around to wrestle a dark angel all night long if there were any chance of escape? The only answer I can think of is this: someone in deep need of blessing; someone willing to limp forever for the blessing that follows the wound.”

“Those of us who wish to draw near to God should not be surprised when our vision goes cloudy, for this is a sign that we are approaching the opaque splendor of God. If we decide to keep going beyond the point where our eyes or minds are any help to us, we may finally arrive at the pinnacle of the spiritual journey toward God, which exists in complete and dazzling darkness.”

“...new life starts in the dark. Whether it is a seed in the ground, a baby in the womb, or Jesus in the tomb, it starts in the dark.” (END)

A Blessing for Traveling in the Dark, by Jan Richardson⁷

Go slow
if you can.
Slower.
More slowly still.
Friendly dark
or fearsome,
this is no place
to break your neck
by rushing,
by running,
by crashing into
what you cannot see.

Then again,
it is true:
different darks
have different tasks,
and if you
have arrived here unawares,
if you have come
in peril

⁶ <https://time.com/65543/barbara-brown-taylor-in-praise-of-darkness/>

⁷ <https://adventdoor.com/2015/11/25/advent-1-a-blessing-for-traveling-in-the-dark/>

or in pain,
this might be no place
you should dawdle.

I do not know
what these shadows
ask of you,
what they might hold
that means you good
or ill.
It is not for me
to reckon
whether you should linger
or you should leave.

But this is what
I can ask for you:

That in the darkness
there be a blessing.
That in the shadows
there be a welcome.
That in the night
you be encompassed
by the Love that knows
your name.

Taize Song – VT 228 – Wait for the Lord

Readings – RE-CREATION & TRANSFORMATION:

Keitha Ogbogu (pastor, Calgary, AB)⁸ – New Leaf Network Advent Reader, Dec. 15, 2023

“Restore our fortunes, Lord, as streams renew the desert. Those who plant in tears will harvest with shouts of joy. They weep as they go to plant their seed, but they sing as they return with the harvest”

Psalm 126:4-6 NLT

*God, as we, the church, find ourselves in a season of “decline” or “unravelling,”
May we remember your intentional presence behind the scenes, your slow and careful work of
bringing new things out of the old.*

Let us picture of the Holy Spirit sitting with a thread puller and a seam ripper taking the well-worn and well-intentioned but increasingly irrelevant and harmful pieces of our lived-out imagination of the church apart. Threadbare squares of material put aside, detached collars and bodice pieces piled up, and colourful woven pieces transformed into piles of colourful thread.

⁸ <https://www.newleafnetwork.ca/articles/2023-second-friday-advent>

The sewing room of God is now filled with the unraveled bits and pieces of all that we have created in our own image...

It is the unraveling of our best efforts, our great ideas, our modern-day pedestal-placed preachers, our boxes of God, our idolization of institutions, our collusion with power, our pursuit of profit, and our declarations of “Peace!” when there is no peace – just to name a few. ...*This is not an easy transformation.*

That which is coming apart are the very things that we built and we declared holy. Yet, for all of our good intentions, to see the threads of our systems come undone can feel like an attack, rather than a blessing.

It is no wonder that we are tempted to cling to the frayed edges and make attempts to gather bodice pieces, trouser hems and stray buttons in order to put it all back together, exactly as it was. Yet, the unravelling persists, for God is on the move.

You remind us to ask: ...what if all of this frantic gathering of thread and fabric squares to piecemeal back together is nothing more than fear showing its ruthless self?

Fear that the God who is known for doing a new thing will not offer us new wineskins, a new way forward, a stream in a dry land.

But what if this unraveling is not intended to lead us to fear, but is an unexpected invitation to sit among the wisps of threads, the unwoven strings, the piles of undone cloths so we can listen and observe?

Listen to the Spirit’s seam rippers.

Watch where the threads are being pulled.

Bear witness to the fabric laid aside.

Observe the process by which some cloths are being unwoven and others, deemed useless, discarded.

Holy work in a holy space, the Spirit’s sewing room floor.

... we are **invited** to join in with this holy work of unravelling.

Doing so with tears in our eyes as we wait for God to make good on the promise, that all will be made new.

The Year as a House: A Blessing (by Jan Richardson)⁹

Think of the year

as a house:

door flung wide

in welcome,

threshold swept

and waiting,

a graced spaciousness

opening and offering itself

to you.

⁹ <https://paintedprayerbook.com/2009/12/31/epiphany-blessing-the-house/>

Let it be blessed
in every room.
Let it be hallowed
in every corner.
Let every nook
be a refuge
and every object
set to holy use.

Let it be here
that safety will rest.
Let it be here
that health will make its home.
Let it be here
that peace will show its face.
Let it be here
that love will find its way.

Here
let the weary come
let the aching come
let the lost come
let the sorrowing come.

Here
let them find their rest
and let them find their soothing
and let them find their place
and let them find their delight.

And may it be
in this house of a year
that the seasons will spin in beauty,
and may it be
in these turning days
that time will spiral with joy.
And may it be
that its rooms will fill
with ordinary grace
and light spill from every window
to welcome the stranger home.

Taize Song – VT 118 – In the Lord I'll be Ever Thankful

Benediction for the New Year

Go in peace,
love and care for one another in the name of Christ,

and may the blessing of God
who established heaven and earth
fill your hearts and pour forth from you upon all people,

may the blessing of the Lord
who is born anew each Christmas time
call you towards a new tomorrow;

and may the blessing of the Spirit
who refreshes and renews all creation
guide and lead you as you enter the new year. Amen.¹⁰

Taize Sending Song – VT 127 – Bless the Lord, My Soul

¹⁰ posted on Rev. Richard J. Fairchild's **Kirshalom** website. <http://www.rockies.net/>