

The Longest Night: Christmas Songs of Lament & Longing

This album was born from music I have played at a reflective, contemplative service held for people who find the holidays a struggle or want to acknowledge the same on behalf of others in the world.

The struggle can be different—loneliness, grief, exhaustion from doing too much and so on, but for those of us who find ourselves in that place the holidays can seem like a long, dark night. It's why the service is held on the Winter Solstice and called The Longest Night of the Year Service for it is literally the longest night of the year.

In her book, *To Dance with God*, Gertrud Mueller Nelson writes,

“Nature and mystery join and invite us to recognize our hopeful longing for the return of the Word made flesh. The days grow shorter and colder and the nights long. Try as we may, we cannot fully dismiss the fundamental feelings that lie deep at our roots, a mixture of feelings dark and sweet.”

I hope my music and these following words of lament and longing found in lyrics, Scripture and the wisdom of those who have experienced their own long nights will help us acknowledge those feelings lying at our roots. May they offer both companionship and hope this holiday season.

-Russ Hitt

We Three Kings

O star of wonder, star of night,
Star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect Light.
-chorus from We Three Kings

Matthew 2:1-12 (New International Version)

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

6 “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.”

7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him,

report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

“Watch the stars, and learn from them.” *-Albert Einstein*

“Those are the same stars and that is the same moon that look down upon your brothers and sisters, and which they see as they look up to them, though they are ever so far away from us, and each other.”
-Sojourner Truth

Coventry Carol

Herod the King, in his raging,
Charged he hath this day;
His men of might, in his own sight,
All children young, to slay.
-lyrics from Coventry Carol

Matthew 2:12-18 (New Revised Standard Version)

12 And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

13 Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” 14 Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, 15 and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.”

16 When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. 17 Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

18 “A voice was heard in Ramah,
wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.”

There is, I am convinced, no picture that conveys in all its dreadfulness, a vision of sorrow, despairing, remediless, supreme. If I could paint such a picture, the canvas would show only a woman looking down at her empty arms. *-Charlotte Brontë*

The Longest Night

Psalm 6:6-9 (New Living Translation)

6 All night I flood my bed with weeping,
drenching it with my tears.

7 My vision is blurred by grief;
my eyes are worn out because of all my enemies.

8 Go away, all you who do evil,
for the LORD has heard my weeping.

9 The LORD has heard my plea;
the LORD will answer my prayer.

Psalm 63:6-8 (New Living Translation)

6 I lie awake thinking of you,
meditating on you through the night.

7 Because you are my helper,
I sing for joy in the shadow of your wings.

8 I cling to you;
your strong right hand holds me securely.

Matthew 27:45-46 (New Revised Standard Version)

45 From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 46 And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

And I know you bore our sorrows
And I know you feel our pain
And I know it would not hurt any less
Even if it could be explained.
-Rich Mullins, lyrics from Hard to Get

I wish I could show you
when you are lonely or
in darkness the
astonishing light
of your own being. *-Hafiz*

What Child is This

Luke 2:8-16 (Contemporary English Version)

8 That night in the fields near Bethlehem some shepherds were guarding their sheep. 9 All at once an angel came down to them from the Lord, and the brightness of the Lord's glory flashed around them. The shepherds were frightened. 10 But the angel said, "Don't be afraid! I have good news for you, which will make everyone happy. 11 This very day in King David's hometown a Savior was born for

you. He is Christ the Lord. 12 You will know who he is, because you will find him dressed in baby clothes and lying on a bed of hay.”

13 Suddenly many other angels came down from heaven and joined in praising God. They said:

14 “Praise God in heaven!
Peace on earth to everyone
who pleases God.”

15 After the angels had left and gone back to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see what the Lord has told us about.” 16 They hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and they saw the baby lying on a bed of hay.

John 1:1,14 (New International Version)

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

What child is this, who, laid to rest,
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King...
-lyrics from What Child is This

Silent Night

Luke 1:46-49 (New Revised Standard Version)

46 And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

48 for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

Luke 2:16-20 (New Revised Standard Version)

16 So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17 When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Silent night, Holy night
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin, mother and child
Holy infant, tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.
-lyrics from Silent Night

John 14:27 (New Revised Standard Version)

27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

O Come O Come Emmanuel

Isaiah 7:14 (King James Version)

14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Matthew 1:22-24 (King James Version)

22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

24 Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:

Luke 1:78-79 (King James Version)

78 Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,

79 To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

O come, Thou Day-Spring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
-lyrics from O Come O Come Emmanuel

Psalms 102:1-2 (King James Version)

102 Hear my prayer, O LORD, and let my cry come unto thee.

2 Hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble; incline thine ear unto me: in the day when I call answer me speedily.

Isaiah 11:1-2 (King James Version)

11 And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:

2 And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD;

Isaiah 9:6 (King James Version)

6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

Reminiscing Christmas

Job 7:11 (The Message)

“And so I’m not keeping one bit of this quiet,
I’m laying it all out on the table;
my complaining to high heaven is bitter, but honest.

Psalms 77:1-12 (The Message)

77 I yell out to my God, I yell with all my might,
I yell at the top of my lungs. He listens.

2-6 I found myself in trouble and went looking for my Lord;
my life was an open wound that wouldn’t heal.

When friends said, “Everything will turn out all right,”
I didn’t believe a word they said.

I remember God—and shake my head.

I bow my head—then wring my hands.

I’m awake all night—not a wink of sleep;

I can’t even say what’s bothering me.

I go over the days one by one,

I ponder the years gone by.

I strum my lute all through the night,

wondering how to get my life together.

7-10 Will the Lord walk off and leave us for good?

Will he never smile again?

Is his love worn threadbare?

Has his salvation promise burned out?

Has God forgotten his manners?

Has he angrily stalked off and left us?

“Just my luck,” I said. “The High God goes out of business
just the moment I need him.”

11-12 Once again I’ll go over what GOD has done,

lay out on the table the ancient wonders;

I’ll ponder all the things you’ve accomplished,

and give a long, loving look at your acts.

Psalm 42:4-5 (Contemporary English Version)

4 Sorrow floods my heart,
when I remember
leading the worshipers
to your house.
I can still hear them shout
their joyful praises.
5 Why am I discouraged?
Why am I restless?
I trust you!
And I will praise you again
because you help me...

Some of Us

Some of us have
Some of us don't
Some of us will
And some of us won't

Some of us hope
And some of us try
Some of us miss
And some of us sigh

Some of us long
For a place to call home
Some of us have one
And still feel alone

Some of us hurt
When some of us leave
Some of us smile
And some of us grieve

Some of us dream
And some of us ask
Why all this waiting
And when will it pass
-Song lyrics by Russ Hitt

Lamentations 3:17-24 (The Message)

16-18 He ground my face into the gravel.
He pounded me into the mud.

I gave up on life altogether.

I've forgotten what the good life is like.

I said to myself, "This is it. I'm finished.

GOD is a lost cause."

19-21 I'll never forget the trouble, the utter lostness,
the taste of ashes, the poison I've swallowed.

I remember it all—oh, how well I remember—
the feeling of hitting the bottom.

But there's one other thing I remember,
and remembering, I keep a grip on hope:

22-24 GOD's loyal love couldn't have run out,
his merciful love couldn't have dried up.

They're created new every morning.

How great your faithfulness!

I'm sticking with GOD (I say it over and over).

He's all I've got left.

Psalm 13:1-6 (The Message)

13 1-2 Long enough, GOD—

you've ignored me long enough.

I've looked at the back of your head
long enough. Long enough

I've carried this ton of trouble,
lived with a stomach full of pain.

Long enough my arrogant enemies
have looked down their noses at me.

3-4 Take a good look at me, GOD, my God;

I want to look life in the eye,

So no enemy can get the best of me
or laugh when I fall on my face.

5-6 I've thrown myself headlong into your arms—

I'm celebrating your rescue.

I'm singing at the top of my lungs,

I'm so full of answered prayers.

Psalm 34:18 (The Message)

18 If your heart is broken, you'll find GOD right there;
if you're kicked in the gut, he'll help you catch your breath.

Psalm 126:5-6 (The Message)

4-6 And now, GOD, do it again—

bring rains to our drought-stricken lives

So those who planted their crops in despair
will shout hurrahs at the harvest,

So those who went off with heavy hearts

will come home laughing, with armloads of blessing.

“But when tragedy, depression, or loneliness steals your joy, you can almost resent the hope that others have...It can be comforting to rely on the one who gives us hope, even when the light of hope doesn't seem to penetrate our temporary darkness.” *-Devotions for Advent, Mosaic Holy Bible*

Lamentations 3:29 (The Message)

Wait for hope to appear.

