

When the star in the sky is gone, when the Kings and Princes are home, when the shepherds are back with their flocks, the work of Christmas begins: To find the lost, to heal the broken, to feed the hungry, to release the prisoner, to teach the nations, to bring Christ to all, to make music in the heart. *Howard Thurman*

Lord God, we come this day, at the start of a new year, to be in your house, in your presence, with our brothers and sisters, to worship, to learn, to be both comforted and challenged, to be reminded that we are followers of Jesus Christ. We sit here in the afterglow of Christmas, when we rejoiced in your birth, sang your story, worshipped the miracle and mystery of Emmanuel – God with us. And it was wonderful! And we are grateful. We feel a renewed sense of peace and joy. And we would like to stay feeling this way. But reality tells us Lord, that soon the pressures and demands and stresses of life will begin to weigh on us, and it will be easy for us to slip back into old habits and routines and attitudes. And so we ask for your help, that we might intentionally remind ourselves, as Rev. Thurman said, that the work of Christmas now begins. We are not to leave Christ in Christmas, and move on. We are to be Christ to the people in our lives. We are to live the teachings and commands of Christ. We are to share the love of Christ. In this new year may our church be a home for the lost and the broken, may our hearts bring compassion to the suffering, may our actions bring justice to the downtrodden and may our hands fill the hungry with not only physical food, but spiritual food as well. May we offer forgiveness to those who “know not what they are doing.” And may we make the music of Christ alive in the hearts of all God’s children. Let us this day, as we come to the Lord’s table, renew our commitment to Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior to go into our part of the world, and keep the work of Christmas alive today and every day.

Lord, as we consider the world around us, we lift our voices in prayer for those we love, for those in need. Sometimes our prayer lists seem long. Sometimes it feels we receive no answer. And yet, we trust that you are indeed present. That your love for our loved ones is immense, and that you see a picture that is bigger and wider than anything we can imagine. And so we continue to pray for individuals and for our world, believing that our prayers do matter and that you are a God who hears and answers in your own way at your own time. And so we come to lift the names of those who are on our hearts and minds...