

# THE SPARE



November 2022 – Advent/Christmas/Epiphany

WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Pittsburgh, PA

One year, my husband and I followed St. Cuthbert's Way, a pilgrimage trail through the borderlands between Scotland and England. St. Cuthbert sang from the Psalter and shared stories from the Gospel of John to introduce the Celts to Jesus.

He preached to the generations who had been invaded by the Romans, Normans, English, and Vikings. The gospel message flourished among those who knew what it meant to get up. This legacy inspired me.

As the days wore on, I felt an accumulated weariness from climbing steep hills and cow-trod paths. Rather than rest, we were compelled to keep a steady pace toward the coast and cross the seabed at low tide to reach the Holy Island of Lindisfarne. Of course, the rain started to fall.

Tired. Wearing soggy boots. Why not call a cab?  
Seriously.

Then we saw this tree. Uprooted from what anyone would presume as necessary for life, it kept going.

God surprises us in the bleak places. Seeds of life germinate in the darkness of the ground, a discarded stump, and a woman's womb.

In this season of Advent and Epiphany, look past the glitter and tinsel. They fade. Seek instead the hope that grows in this community of faith. We've all been knocked down at some time and yet still hold the spark to begin again. See the way hope blooms at Westminster. Jesus' arms are open wide to receive you.

– Jo



# THE SPIRE

Read the *Spire* online at:  
[www.westminster-church.org/news-&-media/the-spire-online](http://www.westminster-church.org/news-&-media/the-spire-online)

*The Spire* is published seasonally by the church staff from September through June. Contributions can be made by emailing a Word document to *Spire* editor Sara Kyle at [sara@ruhlekyle.org](mailto:sara@ruhlekyle.org). Please include the author's name, telephone number, email address, and a title. All articles are subject to editing.

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Staff email addresses and phone extensions are available on our website, [www.westminster-church.org](http://www.westminster-church.org).

# HOPE BLOOM



Christmas Concert 2021



Christmas Eve 2021



Forks & Fellowship 2021

**Our Mission:** We seek to be a caring community of faith committed to bringing people to Christ and developing their faith through worshipping God together, teaching the faith, and serving in mission.

## SUNDAY WORSHIP

**8:30 AM - Sanctuary**  
Traditional

**9:45 AM - WROC/Livestream**  
The Bridge Contemporary

**11:00 AM - Sanctuary/Livestream**  
Traditional

## CONNECT WITH US

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# S @ Westminster



Veritas Christmas Party 2021



Breakfast at the Manger 2019



Christmas Concert 2021



# BETWEEN HERE AND THERE

My daughters have been working on their Christmas lists. In the past few years these lists have become increasingly organized, decorated, and displayed so that there is no disguising the facts: This is about Christmas and these are the things I want. Every once in a while, the lists catch me off guard with something unexpected, and at other times I'm enlisted to support the process ("Dad, how do you spell 'Nintendo?'"). Some things they're likely to receive. Others, they know, are a bit more outlandish – but they ask, nonetheless. These girls know how to ask for what they want.

I wonder when we lose that skill, the ability to ask for the things we really want. Some combination of shame, humility, cultural pressure, or what we might call a "firm grasp on reality" must get in the way, and we end up neglecting or ignoring the desires of our hearts. What might your list look like if you were to slide it across the table to Jesus?

What would be included, how would it be decorated, where would you want it to be displayed? Are there things that would catch others off guard? Would you need to enlist Jesus' support ("Jesus, how do you spell 'time with family?'")?

Matthew 7:11 reminds us: "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" Even if it's a bit outlandish, I wonder what it might be like for you to tell Jesus what you *really* want. What you really need. Even if we may never get it, I wonder if we ought to ask, nonetheless.

What are the things that you really want this Christmas season? I'd love to hear what's on your list. I'll even help you spell it out.

Be well, friends.

– Ed Sutter



# HOPE BLOOMS FOR OUR SPONSORED FAMILY

What do a ladybug, a pumpkin, a werewolf, a Roman soldier, and a fairy have in common? Well, thanks to Westminster's coordination team, especially Danika Lagorio and Marilyn Rubino, they were first time trick-or-treaters in the days before Halloween. We know some of you met the parents and children at the Fall Festival, so you can probably guess the children looked even cuter in their costumes.

To bring you more up to date, the resettlement team has been completing cultural orientation modules to help the family adjust. And the government paperwork is almost done so that the team can help Dad in finding work as he is eager to begin supporting his family. You should also know that the three oldest children really like school. All good news.

Next up on the American-adjustment holiday schedule is Thanksgiving. The team will be working together to prepare a pre-Thanksgiving event that will be hosted by Sandy and Paul Conley so that there will be room for visiting and play options for those five bright, lively children.



Please know that a common theme from each member of our team is how truly, deeply grateful the family is – right down to the little ones – each time we do even the simplest things for them.

Now we hope your prayers will include that the children continue to enjoy school and that Mom and Dad remain the devoted, attentive parents they are. We also hope you will continue your prayers for our team that we may serve the family – and you – well as we work to make them feel more and more at home.

Our hopes for them are being realized. We remain blessed.

– Westminster Refugee Resettlement Team



**A COMMON THEME FROM EACH MEMBER OF OUR TEAM IS HOW TRULY, DEEPLY GRATEFUL THE FAMILY IS – RIGHT DOWN TO THE LITTLE ONES – EACH TIME WE DO EVEN THE SIMPLEST THINGS FOR THEM.**

# JESUS IS THE REASON FOR THE SEASON

All children love Christmas! The magic of the holidays – the decorations, getting together with family and friends, parties, presents, and of course Santa. Our WECEP children are no exception, and December is full of fun activities. But for us, the “real” reason for celebrating is because it’s Jesus’ birthday. And how does one celebrate a birthday – with a party!

Every December we have a Happy Birthday Jesus party. Each WNSK and CDC class gets a visit from a WECEP board member, who reads the Christmas story and brings a specially decorated birthday cake. The children all sing “Happy Birthday” to Jesus and blow out the candles, and of course the snack for the day is a piece of birthday cake. It has become a very special tradition that everyone enjoys.

**THE WECEP CURRICULUM HAS SEVERAL GOALS THAT THE PROGRAM STRIVES TO WORK TOWARD, THE USUAL ONES OF PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL, SOCIAL, AND ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT. BUT WE HAVE ANOTHER GOAL WHICH WE FEEL HAS EQUAL IMPORTANCE, AND THAT IS SPIRITUAL.**

We are proud to be a Christian program with many Christian activities throughout the year. We model Christian behavior and say a prayer before snack and celebrate the Christian holidays. There is Bible Time each month and the staff often tells Bible stories.

Our celebration of Happy Birthday Jesus is one of the best events.



by **KAREN WILLIAMS**

*Karen is an elder (class of 2023) and the WECEP Board Chair*



# I WONDER WHAT YOU WONDER ABOUT...

After sharing Bible stories with children, one of my favorite ways to engage with the story is through wondering questions. Wondering questions don't always have answers and aren't really questions, but invitations to engage with scripture.

**I WONDER** *what animal God created first...*

**I WONDER** *what manna tasted like...*

**I WONDER** *what the rocky soil could be...*

**I WONDER** *what part of the story was most important...*

**I WONDER** *where you see yourself in this story...*

Wondering questions create space for minds to wander and listen for the Holy Spirit. Freed from the bounds of "right" answers, we find space to marvel (and wrestle) with the Bible.

The Gospel of Luke opens with wondering and questions. Zechariah questions the angel Gabriel when he learns that Elizabeth is going to have a son. Later, Gabriel visits Mary who "was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this must be" (Luke 1:29,

NIV). She continues to question Gabriel before accepting God's call and is filled with wonder at all God has done. The Bible is full of stories where God's people wonder, and the Christmas story is no exception.

In class, wondering questions always end with the leader inviting the group to share their wonderings. "I wonder what you wonder about..." The responses always catch me by surprise and challenge me to think in new ways.

As we journey through Advent, where can we make room to wonder? Who can we wonder with? How can we share our wonderings with God?

**I WONDER** *how Mary felt about being a mom...*

**I WONDER** *if Joseph worried about providing for his family...*

**I WONDER** *how Mary and Joseph found hope...*

**I WONDER** *how God shared the good news of Jesus's birth...*

I wonder what you wonder this Advent...

- Faith Kemmler

# HOPE OF ALL THE EARTH

In the middle of October I saw the first Christmas tree in a retail store and smiled. No longer is there waiting for Christmas.

In the church season, Advent invites us to wait and prepare our hearts for the Lord. We hear that the angel Gabriel came to Mary saying, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." Mary learned she would become a mother, and the child was the long-awaited Messiah for the Jewish people. Quite a shock for Mary, an ordinary Jewish girl living in Nazareth with her family. The long-suffering Jewish people had been waiting for God's prophetic word of the promised Messiah for over 400 years. Still, they believed and waited on God. Now the spark of hope was rekindled, the people were remembered by their God. Mary responds in faith.

During Advent we hear the language of scripture – rod of Jesse, a virgin birth, plowshares and pruning hooks – that sounds so strange. The world is singing Christmas carols and we are singing "Come, thou long-expected Jesus...hope of all the earth thou art." Hope itself sounds absurd.

In her poem "After the Annunciation," Madeleine L'Engle concurs:

**THIS IS THE IRRATIONAL SEASON  
WHEN LOVE BLOOMS BRIGHT AND WILD.  
HAD MARY BEEN FILLED WITH REASON  
THERE'D HAVE BEEN NO ROOM FOR THE CHILD.**

To embrace the expectant hope, we first ponder the babe in the manger, love born for us. God loved us so much as to send the son for our sakes.

Angel sightings are hard to anticipate these days. Yet, celestial beings are not necessary, for we have the promises from God. We are beloved. God knows us by name and walks beside us each day. Nothing can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Yes, we can live in this time of anticipation with thanks and hope knowing "hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts." This year during Advent, open us, Lord, to receive the faith, love, and hope once again as we wait, believe, and live for you.

Together on the journey,

Louise

**"HOPE DOES NOT  
DISAPPOINT US,  
BECAUSE GOD'S LOVE  
HAS BEEN POURED  
INTO OUR HEARTS."**





# THE THREEFOLD COMING OF CHRIST

The season of Advent invites us to renew our wonder at the mystery of Christ's incarnation and to renew our commitment to Christ's presence in our hearts and in our actions.

One way to embrace this season of preparation is to think of Christ coming three times: past, present, and future. He came in the flesh as a baby; now, he comes spiritually to enter each of our hearts; at the end of times, he will come in glory. This way of framing the coming of Christ dates back to medieval mystic Bernard of Clairvaux, and was taken up by Lutherans during and after the Reformation.

The twofold coming of Christ – at Christmas and at the Day of Judgment – is familiar. The beauty of adding the spiritual coming is the renewed personal connection with Jesus that will enrich our devotional lives and let Christ's light shine through us.

**“INTO THE FLESH, THIS ONE HAS PASSED.  
INTO OUR HEARTS, THIS ONE HAPPENS DAILY;  
FOR THE JUDGMENT, THIS ONE LIES IN THE FUTURE.”**

*From an instruction book for children by Johann Joachim Neudorf, 1727*

In the busy weeks before Christmas, make a little extra time on Sunday mornings to contemplate what these weeks really mean. **Beginning on November 27**, the four Advent seminars will guide our waiting and preparation for the joy of Christ's incarnation.

Dr. Steven Tuell, Professor Emeritus of Hebrew and Old Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, will present “Isaiah ‘Twas Foretold It,” based on the Hebrew Bible readings for Advent. All are from Isaiah, and all have an intriguing forward focus, allowing us to think about the way that prophecy works and how the Gospel writers (Matthew in particular) shaped their understanding of Jesus using Isaiah as a template.

– Sara Kyle



**ISAIAH ‘T WAS  
FORETOLD IT,  
THE ROSE I HAVE  
IN MIND; WITH  
MARY WE BEHOLD  
IT, THE VIRGIN  
MOTHER KIND. TO  
SHOW GOD’S LOVE  
ARIGHT SHE BORE  
FOR US A SAVIOR,  
WHEN HALF SPENT  
WAS THE NIGHT.**

*“Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming,” vs. 2  
German carol, 15th century*

# WESTMINSTER'S OUTREACH COMMISSION HELPS HOPE BLOOM IN EVERY SEASON

*In the Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall of 2022, Westminster's Outreach Commission has planted seeds of faith with the congregation to share God's love with others. Here are a few highlights from 2022.*

## WINTER

On February 6 a **Racial Wealth Gap Simulation**, presented by Westminster's Peace and Justice Team, made us aware of how to live with justice for all of God's people. The Sunday afternoon event was well attended with 51 participants.

In Malawi, **Maoni Orphan Care** continues to offer daycare for hundreds of orphaned children. Below is a picture of many of the children who receive care thanks to your generous donations.



Racial Wealth Gap Simulation in Fellowship Hall

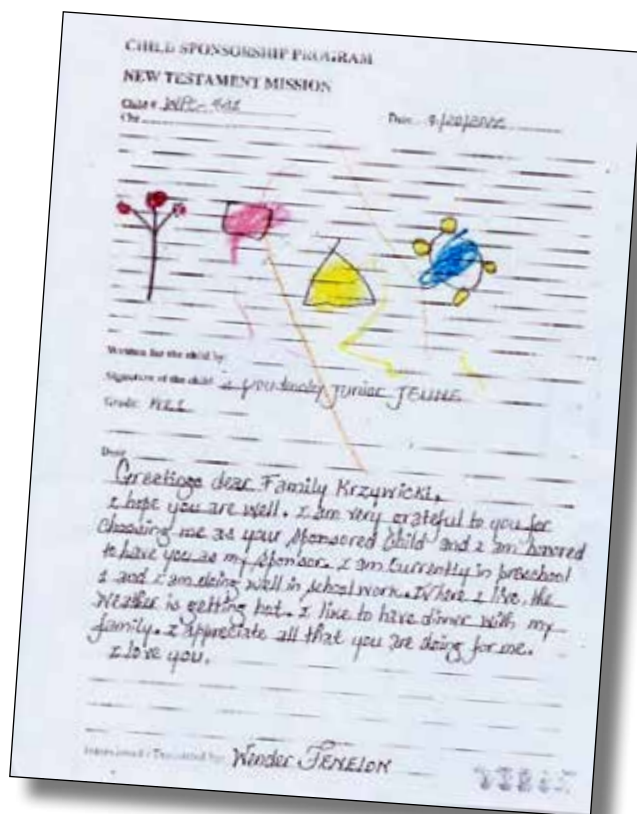


Maoni Orphan Care

## SPRING

On Palm Sunday, April 10, the Pocket Change Project and A Haiti Child Sponsorship Celebration brought great joy to Westminster! Fourteen new sponsors committed to support 15 students at La Croix New Testament Mission in Haiti, bringing the number of children sponsored to 82.

On Palm Sunday it has become a tradition that the Cherub Choir takes the Pocket Change Project collection for Haitian children in their tin buckets, making a joyful noise during each worship service.



## SUMMER

**Gilfillan SHIM Garden** – Starting in April, the Gilfillan garden was lovingly tended each Monday morning by a team of dedicated gardeners. The bounty from the garden fed many with nutritious produce all summer long.

**Cupcake Baking Event** – On July 13, 14 teen and adult volunteers mixed, baked, and frosted 385 cupcakes in the Westminster kitchen in a little less than two hours.

## FALL

**SHIM Food Collection** – On a cold and rainy September 25 a ton of food was dropped off at Westminster during morning worship and then taken to SHIM the following day to fill their food pantry.



On September 27 a refugee family was welcomed by the **Westminster Refugee Resettlement Project Team**. Twenty-seven team members have been actively welcoming and supporting a lovely family of seven from the Middle East.

Westminster has committed to helping the family navigate details surrounding furnishing a house, getting medical care, enrolling the children in school, arranging English ESL classes for the parents, cultural orientation, helping with employment, etc. The work is intense but very rewarding. At right is a picture of the installation of a donated washer and dryer that was gratefully accepted, and needed, by the family.

**Rebuilding Together** is an organization that refurbishes homes in Homewood. A team from Westminster Church traveled to Homewood in October to provide hands-on assistance. In Homewood 75% of adults and 66% of children live in poverty. The team painted and installed new doors and flooring along with other repairs.

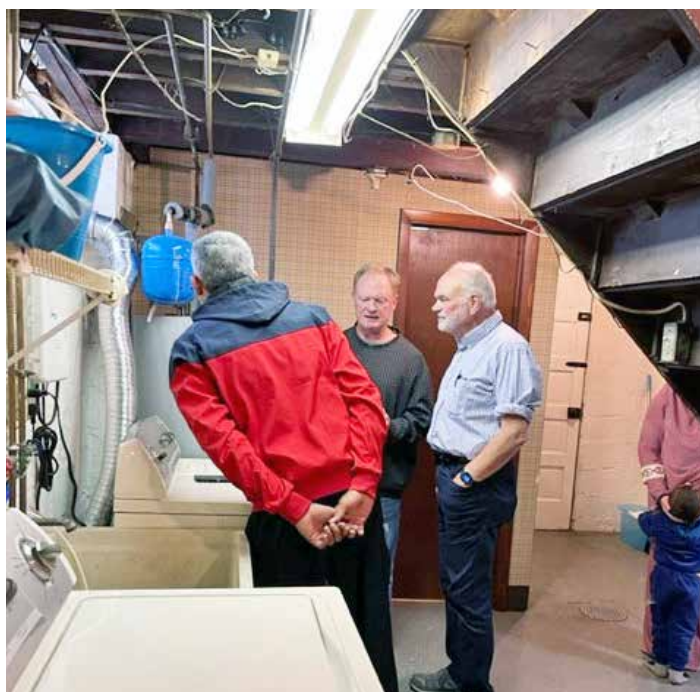
*It is a very exciting time to be a part of what God is doing through Westminster. Hope appears to be blooming everywhere!*



Gilfillan Garden volunteers



Meals on Wheels cupcake baking in Westminster kitchen



Volunteers in Homewood

# 412, OR 4:12?

Living in western Pennsylvania, I imagine many of you have seen all sorts of attire that display three simple numbers: 412. It's a catchy alias for "all things Pittsburgh," and 412 merchandise is recognized around the world.

But what if we chose to look at those numbers and considered the Apostle Paul's words to Timothy when he said, "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity," in 1 Timothy 4:12? How would that choice inform what we say each day, and what we do, and how we treat other people? Because our children are watching us, and they're listening!

Working with the Cherubs is one of my greatest joys and I feel a strong sense of responsibility to teach them that their voices matter, and they can make a difference in their homes, schools, and communities. After all, the future of the church, among other things, depends on them, doesn't it? And God has a plan for them, just as he did with the prophets of the Old Testament.

Jo recently said that the prophets were the "mouthpiece of God." One of the most frequently quoted verses in the Bible is

**"FOR I KNOW THE PLANS I HAVE FOR YOU,'  
DECLARES THE LORD, 'PLANS TO PROSPER  
YOU AND NOT TO HARM YOU, PLANS TO GIVE  
YOU HOPE AND A FUTURE'."**

**JEREMIAH 29:11**

I prayerfully invite you to help me help the children witness this truth, every day, because Westminster is looking toward a promising future filled with hope in our next generation.



by **BETH KETTERMAN**

*Beth is the director of  
Westminster's Cherub Choir*

# THE CHARMING GARDENERS

“LET US BE GRATEFUL TO PEOPLE WHO MAKE US HAPPY,  
THEY ARE THE CHARMING GARDENERS WHO MAKE OUR SOULS BLOSSOM.”

— MARCEL PROUST

In considering Proust’s idea, most of us would, rightfully, first think of our families and friends as those who make us happy. For Westminster members, that list may well include the staff members who help us, comfort us, and care for us throughout the year.

Advent is an important time to recognize them, appreciate them, and thank them for all they do to make the church a haven as we face the joys and concerns of life as well as a place central to the growth of our faith and our relationship with God.

Many members of the Westminster family may not have the opportunity to visit the church on weekdays and acknowledge the staff in person. So, on behalf of the congregation and our friends, the Personnel Commission

wants to let the staff know that, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, we want to help them continue to bloom where they have been planted. While it may seem odd to single out one staff member above others, we want to especially thank Jeannie Schott for all she has done for us in her time at Westminster. We wish her well in accepting her extraordinary new opportunity. And for the staff? We will continually work to nurture them, protect them, and care for them as they care for us.

To paraphrase Rudolf Steiner, may their souls bloom in love for all existence.



by **CAROLYN KERR**

*Carolyn serves on the Personnel and Communications Commissions*





# HERE

You may have noticed that my normal column in the *Spire* is titled “Between Here and There.” It’s just a small nod to the paths of life we walk in our shared and unique corners of the Kingdom. There’s lots of life between where we are and where we are headed! But, for these few paragraphs I’m going to set my focus a bit more precisely. I’d like to consider “Here.” Westminster.

You likely know that I routinely have the chance to sit with groups as we share our experiences and learn from one another. Men’s Group, Parent Confirmation, and more recently the Teen & Parent Mental Health Series as well as the brand-new Couples’ Group. We share our experiences, we share our wisdom, and we are strengthened by the bonds and companionship of collective experience.

In just these past few weeks I’ve been struck that so very many conversations are born out of difficulty, pain, struggle, and failure. We come together to share not only our greatest victories, but also our wounds and our sorrows. Somehow, these conversations don’t feel painful, though. They feel redemptive.

In one of these many conversations, as one member shared an experience, I had an undeniable sense come over me: “You’re surprised by your own comfort.”

## IT WAS AS IF, FOR THE FIRST TIME, SHARING A STORY OF PAIN AND HURT WAS SUDDENLY TRIUMPHANT.

A step forward in what has felt like a long series of retreats.

It makes me think about the words in Psalm 23:5, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” Imagine that. A feast with a seat of honor in front of what had previously felt like grave danger. Every once in a while, we get to stare down the dark shadows of our lives with courage. Every once in a while, we get to sit at the table of victory in full sight of our wounds. In my experience, those moments happen when hope shows its face. When we are surrounded by community and grace. When love supersedes judgement.

Those moments happen *here*. There is hope *here*.

I hope that you’ll join us.

– Ed Sutter

# CHRISTMAS @ WESTMINSTER



**CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP**

**5:00 p.m.**  
Family Service  
*in the Sanctuary*

**7:00 p.m.**  
Contemporary  
Service *in the WROC*

**9:00 & 11:00 p.m.**  
Lessons and Carols  
*in the Sanctuary*

# MILESTONES @ WESTMINSTER

## DEATHS

James (Jim) Boustead III  
October 6

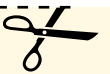
**CHRISTMAS DAY WORSHIP** 10:00 a.m.  
*in the Sanctuary*

# CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS

The Chancel Guild is accepting memorial or honoree contributions for poinsettias. The beautiful poinsettias throughout Westminster during the Christmas season are the result of generous contributions from our members and friends. Use the form below and make your check payable to Westminster Presbyterian Church and write "Poinsettia" on the memo line. Mail your check and form to the church office or place it in the collection plate.

Contributions must be received no later than **Sunday, December 11**, so that your gift can be listed in the Christmas Eve bulletin. Please indicate if you plan to pick up your flower or whether you would like it delivered to a shut-in. Poinsettias will be available on Sunday, December 25, after worship, and Tuesday, December 27, or Wednesday, December 28, between 9:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.

## Christmas Memorial and Honoree Poinsettia Order Form



My Name \_\_\_\_\_

Memorial       Honoree

Name of Memorial/Honoree (PLEASE PRINT)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Deliver poinsettia to shut-in       Will pick up poinsettia on Sunday, December 25, after 10:00 a.m. worship, or Tuesday, December 27, or Wednesday, December 28, between 9:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.

**Please return this form to the church office by Sunday, December 11.**



**WESTMINSTER**  
PRESBYTERIAN  
**CHURCH**

2040 Washington Road  
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[www.westminster-church.org](http://www.westminster-church.org)

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# INTO THIS SILENT NIGHT

Into this silent night  
as we make our weary way  
we know not where,  
**just when the night becomes its darkest**  
and we cannot see our path,  
**just then**  
**is when the angels rush in,**  
their hands full of stars.

—Ann Weems