

Blue Christmas Service

Sunday December 20, 2020 4 in the afternoon

Worship via Zoom Meeting ID 809 865 440 Passcode 469008

We Begin in Silence . . .

A note about silence: there will be short periods of silence during the service for personal reflection. Here are some suggestions for how to use that very quiet time.

Notice your breath

Focus your awareness on your breathing.

As you inhale, say to yourself, "I am breathing in . . . Thank you for life."

As you exhale, "I am breathing out . . . Receive my being."

Focus on a sacred word

Allow a word to rise in your consciousness, and receive it as a gift.

When other thoughts arise, come back to your sacred word.

Create positive imagination

Think of someone who needs your prayer.

Picture that person encircled with the light of Christ.

Rest in God's presence

Do a body scan. Find the tension spots. Relax your muscles.

Say to yourself, "God, I rest in your presence."

The Gathering of the People

Welcome to this Blue Christmas, a time when we can, with others, acknowledge the "blue" feelings we may have at Christmas time, the reasons for them, and offer them to God. This time has been called the "long dark night of the soul" and "the winter of our discontent" in which memories of past experiences and the pain of present experiences can become overwhelming. For some, Christmas Day is the most difficult. For others, it may be Christmas Eve, or New Year's Eve, or the beginning of another lonely New Year.

In this service, we'll have prayers and music appropriate to the season, recognizing that this is not a season of joy for everyone. We will invite you to reflect on the pain, the loneliness, and the sadness you may feel and offer it to God for healing and transformation.

We pray that you will find hope and comfort in knowing that you are not alone. Always remember that God knows your pain and loves you unconditionally.

Worship this afternoon will be led by the Reverends David Jackson and Julie Bryant

I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day, text by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow



All For you, O God, our souls in silence wait.
Truly our hope is in you.

God of abundant mercy, you have given us grace to pray with one heart and one voice, even though our hearts are broken and our voices tremble with grief and sorrow. Comfort, comfort, Lord, your Holy people. Comfort those of us who sit in darkness, mourning 'neath our sorrow's load. Speak to us of the peace that awaits us, of the balm of healing for our weary and wounded souls. We ask all this, trusting in the promise you have made to hear the prayers of two or three who have gathered in the Name of your Holy Child, Jesus. ***Amen.***

Psalm 23, read in unison, Dominus regit me

The LORD is my shepherd;

I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:

he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul:

he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:

for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:

thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:

and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

O Come, O come Emmanuel (*vs 1 and 2*)



The Proclamation of God's Word

A reading from Hebrew Scripture, selected verses from Isaiah 40

"Comfort, comfort my people" says your God. "Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and call to her that the time of service is ended ... Look up to the heavens! Who made the stars, if not the One

who drills them like an army, calling each one by its own name? So mighty is God's power and strength that not one fails to answer.

Israel, why then do you complain that our God does not know your troubles or care if you suffer injustice? Our God, the everlasting God, the creator of the farthest parts of the earth, never grows tired or weary. No one can fathom the depths of God's understanding. God gives power to the faint and strength to the powerless. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength."

O Come, O come Emmanuel (*vs 3 and 4*)

Psalm 22:1 - 11 *read responsively as indicated*

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
and are so far from my cry
and from the words of my distress?

**O my God, I cry in the daytime, but you do not answer;
by night as well, but I find no rest.**

Yet you are the Holy One,
enthroned upon the praises of Israel.

**Our forefathers put their trust in you;
they trusted, and you delivered them.**

They cried out to you and were delivered;
they trusted in you and were not put to shame.

**But as for me, I am a worm and no man,
scorned by all and despised by the people.**

All who see me laugh me to scorn;
they curl their lips and wag their heads, saying,

**"He trusted in the LORD; let him deliver him;
let him rescue him, if he delights in him."**

Yet you are he who took me out of the womb,
and kept me safe upon my mother's breast.

**I have been entrusted to you ever since I was born;
you were my God when I was still in my mother's womb.**

Be not far from me, for trouble is near,
and there is none to help.

A Gospel Reading, Matthew 11:28-29

"Come to me, all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

O Come, O come Emmanuel (*vs 5*)

We will have a time of silence. You are invited to write or draw if you feel moved to do so, making note in word or image of the concerns of your heart.

Candle-Lighting Service of Remembrance

God who is with us, in this season of looking forward, of anticipating the celebration of your Son's birth and return in glory, we often find ourselves uncomfortable, uneasy, worried and sad. The lights and gaiety, the music, the bright joy around us, often make us more unquiet, more out of step, feeling even more disconnected and different.

All ***Come, holy Child of Bethlehem.***

Some of these feelings come from false expectations. Others come from real situations and issues that face us or those we love. Some are from events we may influence and some are beyond our control. Trusting in your grace and provision, we name these situations and face the pain and dislocation they cause us.

All ***Come, holy Child of Bethlehem.***

We claim your promise to companion us in bearing them. We claim your steadfast love for us, knowing you will help us find peace for our troubled spirits. We claim your wise and merciful power, that you will meet each need as is best for us. **Amen.**

The Taize Hymn ‘Wait for the Lord’ begins.

As the first candle is lighted,

God of Light and Life, we light this candle for all those who are struggling with issues involving physical or mental health. We especially remember those struggling with cancer, depression, or thoughts of suicide. May its light remind us all of the healing available to us in Christ Jesus. Hear our prayers that anguish be minimized and your good plan fulfilled for each who suffer.

As the second candle is lighted,

We light this candle for all those who are struggling with issues involving financial concerns, job loss, seemingly insurmountable debt. May its light remind us all that you are the Great Provider, you will give us our daily bread. Empower us to take the steps we need to solve these problems. Draw us to the right people and programs to help us.

As the third candle is lighted,

We light this candle for all those who grieve. You know our deepest need, you understand our pain- lost dreams, lost opportunities, the separation of death. May its light remind us that we are not orphaned, we are not alone. Grant us grace that in pain we may find comfort, in sorrow hope, and in death resurrection.

As the fourth candle is lighted,

We light this candle for all those who wrestle with the chains of addiction. Help us to name that which enslaves us and face it: food, alcohol, drugs, pornography, shopping, escapism, self medication, and self abuse in all its forms. May this candle bring your light to those secret, and not so secret, activities of imprisonment. Hear our prayers for deliverance and freedom; help us and those we love break the hold of these evils.

As the fifth candle is lighted,

We light this candle for all those who are victims of violence in any of its forms. May its light lead us to peace, safety, and truth. Pour forth encouragement to claim your help in healing physically and spiritually, to trust in your justice, to find assistance, to resist blaming ourselves, to be confident in the future you have planned for us, a future full of hope.

As the sixth candle is lighted,

We light this candle for all those who are experiencing the pain of broken relationships with family, children, spouses, and friends. May its light remind us of the pure communion you desire for all your creation. Our desire for this same communion makes estrangement so painful. Lead us to relinquish the hold broken relationships have on us, to forgive ourselves for our contribution to the breach, to forgive those who have hurt us, to take the steps to mend that relationship, if possible. Lord, we know that sometimes we suffer from a broken relationship

with someone who is now dead. Help us to prayerfully examine, receive and extend forgiveness in that situation, that we may live again.

As the seventh candle is lighted,

We light this candle for all those who are suffering the consequences of war, famine and unbridled disease. May its light remind us of your holy calling to every one who believes you are the light of the world. Change the hearts of all who resort to violence, who seek revenge. Protect those who find themselves far from home serving their nations or the needy. We know you are in the midst of those in anguish and pray that your healing presence will be seen, felt, and embraced. Reveal to us how to join in your saving work- to make tangible gifts to alleviate suffering, to support those on the front lines of natural and manmade disasters, to pray unceasingly for peace in our families, our neighborhoods, our world.

As the eighth candle is lighted,

We light this candle for all those who are estranged from you, who are besieged with doubts, who are overwhelmed by the world and do not claim your presence in their lives. We pray for them, and therefore ourselves, for we confess that each of us knows this condition. Lord, may the light of your love lead us all home to you.

We ask all these things in the name of Jesus. **Amen.**

Let us pray.

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

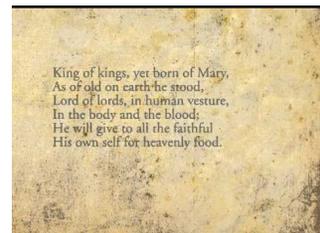
The Blessing

My friends, life is short, and we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who make this earthly pilgrimage with us, so be swift to love, and make haste to do kindness, and the blessing of God, who comes to us as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier be upon you and all whom you love and pray for this day, and forever more. **Amen.**

Let us bless the Lord.

All Thanks be to God.

Closing Hymn 'Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence'



Blue Christmas Service adapted from text by The Reverend Ann Fontaine