

As We Gather

Blue Christmas Service for the Longest Night is a Christian tradition, is a time of worship in the Advent season marking the darkest night of the year.

On this day, we honor people that have lost loved ones and are experiencing grief in any way.

This worship service is held on or around the longest night of the year, December 21, the Winter Solstice. Our worship includes opportunities for expression of grief and pain as well as an opportunity to focus on the promise of hope. Candles, arranged as an Advent wreath, are lit at numerous occasions during the service; and empty chairs are reserved as a way of commemorating those who have been lost during the previous year or those whom we may be missing.

Welcome & Invocation

Call to Worship

Pastor: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

All things were made by God, and without God nothing came to be.
What came to be through God was life, and this life was the light of the world.
The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Hymn: O Little Town of Bethlehem

Sung by Pastor

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie;
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love
O morning stars together, proclaim the holy birth
And praises sing to God the King, and peace to men on earth.

How silently, how silently, the wondrous Gift is given;
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.

No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin
 Where meek souls will receive him still, the dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray
 Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us this day
 We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell
 O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel.

The First Reading: Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 A Time for Everything

**3 There is a time for everything,
 and a season for every activity under the heavens:**

- 2 a time to be born and a time to die,
 a time to plant and a time to uproot,**
- 3 a time to kill and a time to heal,
 a time to tear down and a time to build,**
- 4 a time to weep and a time to laugh,
 a time to mourn and a time to dance,**
- 5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
 a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,**
- 6 a time to search and a time to give up,
 a time to keep and a time to throw away,**
- 7 a time to tear and a time to mend,
 a time to be silent and a time to speak,**
- 8 a time to love and a time to hate,
 a time for war and a time for peace.**

9 What do workers gain from their toil? 10 I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. 11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet^a no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

Psalm 22

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
 Why are you so far from helping me, so far from the words of my groaning?
**O my God, I cry by day but you do not answer,
 and by night, but I find no rest.**
 In you, our ancestors trusted. They trusted and you delivered them.
**It was you who brought me from the womb,
 you who kept me safe on my mother's breast.**
Since my mother bore me, you have been my God.
 Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.
God does not despise the affliction of the afflicted.
God does not hide from me.
When I cry to God, God hears me.
Thanks be to God.

Psalm 23

**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.

Advent Wreath Litany of Remembrance *(The first candle is lighted.)*

Pastor: We light this first candle in Advent for Hope to remember those whom we have loved and lost.

We pause to remember clearly, their faces, their voices, their bodies.

We embrace and give thanks for the memories that bind them to us in this season of expectation,

when all Creation waits for the Light.
 We remember them with love. May God's eternal love surround them.

**O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel
 That mourns in lonely exile here, until the son of God appear
 Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, o Israel.**

A period of silent reflection

The second candle is lighted.

Pastor: We light this second candle in Advent for **Peace** to remember the pain of loss:

loss of relationships, loss of trust, loss of jobs, loss of health, loss of faith, the loss of joy.

We acknowledge and embrace the pain of the past, O God, and we offer it to You, asking that into our wounded hearts and open hands You will place the gift of peace, shalom.

We remember that through You all things are possible.

Refresh, restore, renew us, o God, and lead us into Your future.

**O come thou Wisdom from on high, who orderest all things mightily
 To us the path of knowledge show, and teach us in her ways to go
 Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, o Israel.**

A period of silent reflection

The third candle is lighted.

Pastor: We light this third candle in Advent for **Joy** to remember ourselves this Christmas time.

We pause and remember the past weeks, months, and for some of us years, that have been heavy with our burdens.

We accept and lay before you, God, the sharpness of memory, the sadness and grief, the hurt and fear, the anger and pain.

We accept and lay before you the ways we feel we have fallen short, and the times we have spent blaming ourselves, and you, for all that we have suffered.

We accept and lay before you the time we have walked alone, in darkness; and in knowledge of our own mortality.

**We remember that though we have journeyed far, and that, while lost,
 we may have turned away from the light,**

the light itself has not failed.
 We remember that though winter be upon us and though the night be dark,
 with the turning of the Wheel the dawn will come, and dawn defeats the darkness.

O come thou day-spring, come and cheer our spirits by thy advent here
 Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put to flight
 Rejoice, rejoice Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.
A period of silent reflection

The fourth candle is lighted.

Pastor: We light this fourth candle in Advent to remember Love, the gift of light and hope that God offers to us in the story of Christmas, which began in abandonment, insecurity, and humbleness, in a time of war and in a poor stable.

We remember that the loving God who kept the light shining in the temple and who came to share this life with us promises us comfort and peace.

We remember the One who shares our burdens, who shows us the way to the Light, and who journeys with us into all our tomorrows.

O come desire of nations, bind in one the hearts of all mankind
 Bid then our sad, divisions cease, and be thyself our King of Peace
 Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.
A period of silent reflection

Psalm 121

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills,
 from whence cometh my help.
 My help cometh from the Lord,
 who hath made heaven and earth.
 He will not suffer thy foot to be moved;
 he that keepeth thee will not slumber;
 behold, the God that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.
 The Lord is thy keeper; the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand.
 The sun shall not smite thee by day nor the moon at night.
 The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil and shall sustain thy soul.

He shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in,
from this time forth and even forevermore.

The Prayers of the People

Pastor: God of wisdom, we come to you this Christmas Season tired, in turmoil, and in pain.

As the nights have grown longer, so has darkness grown and wrapped itself around our hearts.

In this season of longest night, we ask your healing blessings upon all that we carry in our hearts --

sorrow we fear may never end, wounds we cannot even put into words.

Lord, hear our prayer,

And in Your merciful love, answer.

Pastor: God of mercy and compassion, there are those among us who are grieving over what might have been.

Death or loss or terrible hurt has changed our experience of Christmas.

We remember that once it was a special day for us, too, but someone or something precious has gone away from us in this life.

We have lost a beloved, a job, a goal, a cause, a dream. We find ourselves adrift and alone.

We are weary from the journey, and we have found no room at the inn.

We come to you seeking rest, and peace, and shelter from the storm. Lord, hear our prayer.

And in Your merciful love, answer.

Pastor: God of grace, in the spirit of the season, grant us all that we need to comfort us as we journey through this Christmas season.

We ask that you shelter and sustain all those of us, both here and throughout the world, who wander or want or weep or are heavy laden, that we may be lifted up in courage and journey on in Thy peace. Lord, hear our prayer.

And in Your merciful love, answer.

Pastor: God of love, in this Christmas Season we embrace and offer up to you all that used to be which is now lost to us, and cannot be again.

With celebration all around us, memories of what was, and fears of what may be, weigh heavy on our hearts.

Please hold us close in your embrace, be near to us this night, until the light returns and morning comes.

Lord, hear our prayer,

And in Your merciful love, answer.

Pastor: Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give thine angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for thy love's sake. Amen.

Third Reading: Luke 2:1-7

The Birth of Jesus

2 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while ^a Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register.

⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Prayer

Pastor: Let us pray.

Almighty God, we thank you for your constant love and for the blessings of this day.

We know that even when we cannot see or feel you, still you are there. Help us to remember you and to listen for your voice in the words of family, friends, and strangers.

Kindle our hearts and awaken hope, that we may know you as you reveal yourself in the world and in our lives.

Let the light of your holy Spirit shine like these candles in the darkness, lighting the way for all who feel despairing, lost, or forgotten, and grant that it may come to dwell so deeply in our hearts that it may shine on, for us and for those we meet along the way. Amen.

Hymn (*Silent Night*)

Silent night, holy night,
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon Virgin Mother and Child,
Holy Infant, so tender and mild.
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night,
Shepherds quake at the sight;
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heav'nly hosts sing alleluia;
Christ, the Savior, is born!

Silent night, holy night,
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

Blessing

Pastor: The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace, both now and forever more. Amen.