

Blue Christmas
A Service of Wholeness and Healing



December 21, 2020

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St. Mary's Episcopal Church
9425 Third Ave.
Stone Harbor, NJ 08247

THE GATHERING OF THE PEOPLE

Welcome to this Blue Christmas, a time when we can, with others, acknowledge the "blue" feelings we 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.

There are many moments in our lives when we need comfort. There are times when we yearn for consolation. The suffering people who looked for the long-awaited Messiah were given a hope-filled image of God in the writings of Isaiah. It expresses the belief that no matter what happens to us, God will be there to comfort and support us.

Christmas can be a time for many when we are in need of that reassurance and comfort. Covid-19 has separated us from being in the presence of those we love. Some are grieving over the loss of a loved one, struggling with illness, or have experienced the loss of a job. We wonder how we will get through the holidays.

For some, Christmas Day is the most difficult. For others, it may be Christmas Eve, or New Years Eve, or the beginning of another New Year. In this service, we'll have some singing appropriate to the season, recognizing that not everyone feels the joy of the season. We will invite you to reflect on the burdens, grief or pain you may feel and offer them 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 you, what burdens you and loves you unconditionally.

"Advent"

written by Jessica Powers

*I live my Advent in the womb of Mary.
And on one night when a great star swings free
From its high mooring and walks down the sky
To be the dot above the Christus i,
I shall be born of her by blessed grace.
I wait in Mary-darkness, faith's walled place,
with hope's expectance of nativity.
I know for long she carried me and fed me,
Guarded and loved me, though I could not see.
But only now, with inward jubilee,
I come upon earth's most amazing knowledge:
Someone is hidden in this darkness with me.*

Welcome

Priest: *Today we come looking for the Christ Child.*

All: *We come, bringing our burdens, hurts, our worries, and fears.*

Priest: *We come seeking relief from pain. With the psalmist of old we say,*

All: *“O Lord, you are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living. Give heed to my cry, for I am brought very low.”*

Priest: +For you, O God, our souls in silence wait.

All: *Truly our hope is in you.*

Opening Prayer

Priest: God of abundant mercy, you have given us grace to pray with one heart and one voice, even though our hearts are weary and our voices tremble with longing. 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 Most Holy Child, Jesus.

All: *Amen.*

Hymn “Abide with Me”

Psalm 121, read in unison, Dominus regit me

- ¹ I lift up my eyes to the hills—
from where will my help come?
- ² My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.
- ³ He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
- ⁴ He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
- ⁵ The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
- ⁶ The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.
- ⁷ The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
- ⁸ The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore.

O Come, O come Emmanuel, vs 1 and 2

1. O come, O come, Em - man - u - el,
 2. O come, O Wis - dom from on high,
 3. O come, O come, great Lord of might,
 4. O come, O Rod of Jes - se's stem,
 5. O come, O Key of Dav - id, come,

And ran - som cap - tive Is - ra - el,
 Who or - ders all things might - i - ly;
 Who to your tribes on Si - nai's height
 From ev - 'ry foe de - liv - er them
 And o - pen wide our heav'n - ly home;

That mourns in lone - ly ex - ile here
 To us the path of knowl - edge show,
 In an - cient times once gave the law,
 That trust your might - y power to save,
 Make safe the way that leads on high,

Un - til the Son of God ap - pear.
 And teach us in her ways to go.
 In cloud, and maj - es - ty, and awe.
 And give them vic - t'ry o'er the grave.
 And close the path to mis - er - y.

Re - joice! Re - joice! Em - man - u - el
 Shall come to you, O Is - ra - el.

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 each, 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)

O come, O come, thou Lord of might,
who to thy tribes on Sinai's height
in ancient times didst give the law,
in cloud, and majesty, and awe.

Refrain

O come, thou Branch of Jesse's tree,
free them from Satan's tyranny
that trust thy mighty power to save,
and give them victory o'er the grave.

A Reading from the Psalms, Psalm 22 as follows

Priest: 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?

ALL: O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but I find no rest.

Priest: In you, our ancestors trusted. They trusted and you delivered them.

ALL: It was you who took me from the womb, you who kept me safe upon my mother's breast; since my mother bore me, you have been my God.

Priest: Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

ALL: 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!

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)

*O come, thou Key of David, come,
and open wide our heavenly home;
make safe the way that leads on high,
and close the path to misery.*

Refrain

There follows a time for silent reflection. During this time. You are invited to name your burdens, loss or sadness and print it on the paper. The papers will be gathered in a basket and placed near the candles for blessing.

CANDLE LIGHTING LITANY OF REMEMBRANCE

Reader: 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

Reader: 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. 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.

Silence

Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.

Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!

The image shows two staves of musical notation in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The first staff contains the melody for the first line of text, and the second staff contains the melody for the second line. The lyrics are printed below the notes.

Reader: 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.

Silence

Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.

Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!

This image is identical to the one above, showing musical notation for the first two lines of the litany.

Reader: 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.

Silence

Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.

Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!

Reader: 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.

Silence

Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.

Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!

Reader: 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.

Silence

Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.

Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!

Reader: 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.

Silence

Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.

Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!

Reader: 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.

Silence

Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.

Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!

Reader: 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.

Silence

Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.

Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!

Reader: 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.

Silence

We ask all these things in the strong name of Jesus.

Amen.

Priest: *The Lord be with you*

All: And also with you

Priest: *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 be kind, and may the blessing of God, who comes to us as + Creative Presence, Saving Grace and Lifegiving Spirit be upon you and all whom you love and pray for this day, and forever more.

All: Amen.

Hymn: Maranatha Come Lord Jesus

DISMISSAL

One: Let us bless the Lord

All: Thanks be to God

CHRISTMAS SCHEDULE

December 24th, Christmas Eve	Eucharist	7:00 pm	Music
December 25th, Christmas Day	Eucharist	9:00 am	Said

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