

St. Mark's Episcopal Church

Blue Christmas Service

December 21, 2022 6:00 pm

Officiant: 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.

People: The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Welcome!

The Collects of the Day

The Presider says to the people

The Lord be with you.

People And also with you.

Presider Let us pray.

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

God of Mercy, hear our prayer in this Advent Season for ourselves and our families who live with the painful memories of loss. We ask for strength for today, courage for tomorrow and peace for the past. We ask these things in the name of your Christ who shares our life in joy and sorrow, death and new birth, despair and promise. *Amen.*

The First Reading: Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.

What gain have the workers from their toil? I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with. He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover, he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

Psalm 23

(All read together.)

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 annointest 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.

Isaiah 40:1-11

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

Psalm 121

1 I lift up my eyes to the hills; *
from where is my help to come?

- 2 My help comes from God, *
the maker of heaven and earth.
- 3 God will not let your foot be moved *
the One who watches over you will not fall asleep.
- 4 Behold, the One who keeps watch over Israel *
shall neither slumber nor sleep;
- 5 The Holy One watches over you; *
and is your shade at your right hand,
- 6 So that the sun shall not strike you by day, *
nor the moon by night.
- 7 God shall preserve you from all evil; *
it is the One who shall keep you safe.
- 8 God shall watch over your going out and
your coming in, *
from this time forth for evermore.

Third Reading: Matthew 1:18-24

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us.' When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the

Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Meditation

The Rev. Nancy L. Threadgill

A Liturgy of Remembrance

(Using the Advent Wreath Candles)

Reader: This first candle we light to remember those whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember clearly their names, 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.

(Pause while the first candle is lit)

All: We remember them with love. May God's eternal love surround them.

Reader: This second candle we light is to redeem the pain of loss: loss of relationships, loss of jobs, loss of health, loss of trust, loss of faith, loss of joy.

(Pause while the second candle is lit.)

We pause to gather up the pain of the past and offer it to God, asking that into our wounded hearts and open hands, God will place the gift of peace.

All: We remember that through God all things are possible. Refresh, restore, renew us O God, and lead us into your future.

Reader: This third candle we light is to remember ourselves this Christmas time. We pause and remember these past weeks, months and for some of us years, that have been heavy with our burdens. We accept and lay before you, God, the disbelief, the anger and pain, the sadness and grief, the sharpness of memory, the hurt and fear. 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.

(Pause while the third candle is lit.)

We give thanks for all the support we have known.

All: 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 earth the dawn will come. Let us remember that dawn defeats darkness.

Reader: This fourth candle is lit to remember faith, the gift of light hope that God offers to us in the stories of Hanukkah and of Christmas, which both also began in abandonment, insecurity, and humbleness, in a time of war and in a poor stable.

(Pause while the fourth candle is lit.)

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

All: 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.

If you so desire, please come forward at this time and light a votive in remembrance and then return to your seat.

Prayers of the People

Leader: 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,

All: And in Your merciful love, answer.

Leader: 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.

All: And in Your merciful love, answer.

Leader: 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.

All: And in Your merciful love, answer.

Leader: 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,

All: And in Your merciful love, answer.

Officiant: 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.

Offering of Light

Officiant: One legend we celebrate in this season tells how a few brave fighters, defending their temple, had only enough oil to light the sacred lamp for one day, but it burned eight days until relief arrived. Another legend tells how in a little hill town a homeless couple with tax problems took shelter in a stable among the animals and gave birth to a light that would change the world.

Let us pray.

All: Gentle God of love, help us reach out together for the light of faith, for renewal and recovery and a new day coming. Grant that hope may come to rest in our hearts, and let it go forth with us into the darkness, this night and in the nights to come, until we see the dawn.

Officiant: Lighten our darkness, we beseech you, O God; give us light in the night season; and by your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night. Amen.

Prayer

Officiant: Let us pray

All: 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 when we leave this place it may shine on, for us and for those we meet along the way. Amen.

Hymn

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.

Closing Prayer:

Most Gracious Heavenly God, we have come to this service because there are things that cause us to call this time of year a Blue Christmas. We now offer all of them up to you. Please attend to all these needs.

Lord, in your mercy
Hear our prayer.

Compassionate God, we ask that you free us from the darkness that traps us in our sadness. We ask the words be spoken even when we cannot express them ourselves. Our experience of Christmas has been changed because of a death or loss or physical or mental illness. We used to look forward to this time of year, too, but now we only feel like we are outside looking in on the joy. Bring back the joy.

Lord, in your mercy
Hear our prayer.

The holiday season reminds us of what used to be. But the celebration of your son's birth... the real Christmas...reminds us of hope and promise. Please be near us this day.

Lord, in your mercy
Hear our prayer.

Officiant: Let us pray.

**All: Another day will come, O God.
I know not what it may bring forth, but make me ready, God, for whatever it may be.
If I am to stand up, help me to stand bravely.
If I am to sit still, help me to sit quietly.
If I am to lie low, help me to do it patiently.
And if I am to do nothing, help me do it gallantly.
Make these words more than words, and give me the Spirit of thy Peace. Amen.**

Officiant: O God, support us all the day long in this troubled life, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then Lord, in thy mercy, grant us safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last. Amen.

Blessing and Dismissal

Officiant: 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.

Let us go forth into the world,
rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.

People **Thanks be to God.**

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing through the power of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*
Romans 15:13

Parts of The Blue Christmas service used tonight is based on an order developed and used at The Cathedral Church of Saint Andrew, Honolulu Hawaii.