



The Longest Night: Blue Christmas

Finding Solace in Times of Darkness

Lord of Love Lutheran Church (ELCA)

10405 Fort St., Omaha, NE 68134

Wednesday, December 21, 2022

7:00pm Service

INTRODUCTION TO TONIGHT'S SERVICE:

While Advent is a season of hope and Christmas is a season of joy, not everyone feels hopeful or like celebrating. Grief, illness, aging, depression, loneliness, unemployment, and loss are magnified. Even those who are not struggling with losses may feel the stress of preparations and expectations around Christmas time. A Longest Night/Blue Christmas service may provide a time and place of solace during the often frenetic days surrounding the celebration of Christmas. We come together seeking healing and room to share grief, sadness, loneliness, or confusion when these emotions often feel out of place during the holidays.

In the Northern Hemisphere, December 21 is the longest night, the winter solstice. It marks the shortest day of the year, the official start of winter. Tradition says that nature and all her creatures stop and hold their breath to see if the sun will turn back from its wanderings, if the days will lengthen and the earth will once again feel the sun's warmth. On this darkest day of the year, we come with our honest yearnings seeking the return of light and hope.

THE PRAYER OF PREPARATION

God of compassion and love, we give you thanks and praise for the opportunity to share our sorrow and pain at a time when many are laughing and filled with great joy. The holidays are difficult for us as we remember the loss of those we have loved. May this time in your presence grant us comfort and peace as we acknowledge our feelings and rest in the eternal hope you offer through Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray,

Amen.

THE CALL TO WORSHIP

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; on those who lived in a land of deep shadow a light has shone.

For the yoke that was weighing upon them, and the burden upon their shoulders, God has broken in pieces.

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

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth, and we have seen his glory.

In him was life, and that life was the light of all.

The light shines on in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

THE HYMN OF PRAISE *“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” ELW 257 (v.1-4)*

PRAYER OF THE DAY

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 Jesus Christ who shares our life in joy and sorrow, death and new birth, despair and promise.

FIRST READING..... Isaiah 40:1, 25-31

^{40:1} Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.

²⁵ To whom then will you compare me,
or who is my equal? says the Holy One.

²⁶ Lift up your eyes on high and see:
Who created these?

He who brings out their host and numbers them,
calling them all by name;

because he is great in strength,
mighty in power,
not one is missing.

²⁷ Why do you say, O Jacob,
and speak, O Israel,
'My way is hidden from the Lord,
and my right is disregarded by my God'?

²⁸ Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.

²⁹ He gives power to the faint,
and strengthens the powerless.

³⁰ Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;

³¹ but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.

RESPONSIVE HYMN *"Comfort, Comfort Now My People"* ELW 256

THE LITANY OF HOPE

Psalm 121

I will lift up mine eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?

My help comes from God who made heaven and earth.

God who keeps you will not slumber, nor suffer your foot to be moved.

Behold the Holy One who keeps Israel shall not slumber or sleep.

The Almighty is your keeper and the shade on your right hand. The sun shall not hurt you by day or the moon by night. The Creator shall preserve you from all evil and shall preserve your soul.

Thanks be to God who preserves our going out and our coming in from this time forth and even for evermore.

THIRD READING.....Matthew 11:28-30

²⁸ [Jesus said,]"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

RESPONSIVE HYMN "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" ELW 257 (v.5-7)

FOURTH READING..... John 1:1-5,14

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

SERMON

ADVENT WREATH "Light one Candle to Watch for Messiah" ELW 240

**We will be singing this one verse, light a candle, and repeating this pattern (see below)*



- 1 Light one can-dle to watch for Mes-si - ah: let the light ban-ish dark - ness.
- 2 Light two can-dles to watch for Mes-si - ah: let the light ban-ish dark - ness.
- 3 Light three can-dles to watch for Mes-si - ah: let the light ban-ish dark - ness.
- 4 Light four can-dles to watch for Mes-si - ah: let the light ban-ish dark - ness.



He shall bring sal - va - tion to Is - ra - el, God ful - fills the prom - ise.
He shall feed the flock like a shep-herd, gent - ly lead them home-ward.
Lift your heads and lift high the gate-way for the King of glo - ry.
He is com - ing, tell the glad tid - ings. Let your lights be shin - ing!

Text: Wayne L. Wold, b. 1954

Music: TIF IN VELDELE, Yiddish folk tune

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Sing verse 1

We light the first candle to remember those whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember their name, their face, their voice, the memory that binds them to us in this season.

May God's eternal love surround them.

Sing verse 2

We light the second candle to remember the pain of our loss; the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, the loss of health. We pause to gather up the pain

of the past and offer it to God, asking that from God's hands we receive the gift of peace.

Refresh, restore, renew us O God, and lead us into your future. As we grasp your hands and receive the embrace of your peace.

Sing verse 3

We light the third candle to remember ourselves this Christmas time. We pause and remember these past weeks and months; the disbelief, the anger, the down times, the poignancy of reminiscing, the hugs and handshakes of family and friends, all those who stood with us and give thanks for all the support we have known.

Let us remember that light defeats the darkness.

Sing verse 4

We light the fourth candle to remember our faith and the gift of hope, which the Christmas story offers to us. Here we remember that God who shares our life promises us a place and time where there will be no more pain and suffering.

Let us remember our Savior Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, who bears the light and shows us the way, unveiling the truths of eternal life.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

In the spirit of this season let us now confidently ask God for all the things we need; For ourselves as we participate in whatever way we can this Christmas. God hear our prayer.

And in your mercy answer.

For our families and friends that they may continue to help and support us and accompany us through our trials and tribulations. God, hear our prayer.

And in your mercy answer.

For the people we have loved and lost. For all the losses that we know, that all may be redeemed by your Easter promise. God, hear our prayer.

And in your mercy answer.

For all our family and friends that they may know the love, peace and hope and joy in you. God, hear our prayer.

And in your mercy answer.

For the peace proclaimed by the Christmas angels to come throughout the whole world. God hear our prayer.

And in your mercy answer.

God of great compassion and love. Listen to the prayers of these, your people. Grant to all who feel the uncertainty that cold and darkness brings the the hope and love you offer us in the light of Christ.

Amen.

CLOSING HYMN "Silent Night, Holy Night" ELW 281

*We will be sharing the peace light with one another as we sing.

Stil - le Nacht, hei - li - ge Nacht! Al - les schläft,
 1 Si - lent night, ho - ly night! All is calm,
 2 Si - lent night, ho - ly night! Shep - herds quake
 3 Si - lent night, ho - ly night! Son of God,

ein - sam wacht nur das trau - te, hoch - hei - li - ge Paar.
 all is bright round yon vir - gin moth - er and child.
 at the sight; glo - ries stream from heav - en a - far,
 love's pure light ra - diant beams from your ho - ly face,

Hol - der Kna - be im lok - ki - gen Haar, schlaf in himm - li - scher
 Ho - ly In - fant, so ten - der and mild, sleep in heav - en - ly
 heav'n - ly hosts . . . sing, al - le - lu - ia! Christ, the Sav - ior, is
 with the dawn of re - deem - ing grace, Je - sus, Lord, at your

Ruh, schlaf in himm - li - scher Ruh.
 peace, sleep in heav - en - ly peace.
 born! Christ, the Sav - ior, is born!
 birth, Je - sus, Lord, at your birth.

BLESSING

May the Light of Christ that now shines with warmth in your hands, now settle deep in your hearts, accompanying you through all your moments of darkness, reminding you, beloved child of God, that you are not alone, and this light will one day banish all our darkness when light perpetual comes to shine on us forever.

Amen.

You may blow out your candles and leave sharing signs of peace and love with one another.

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