

Blue Christmas: A Service of Hope and Remembrance

WELCOME

OPENING PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit. Comfort us and all who mourn this night. Give us strength to grieve as we must. Help us to receive your healing in the midst of our pain, and find new order after the chaos of loss; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

CENTERING MUSIC

(Marcus – your grief-bearing song of choice here)

POEM

I cannot tell you how the light comes.

What I know is that it is more ancient than imagining.

That it travels across an astounding expanse to reach us.

*That it loves searching out what is hidden, what is lost, what is forgotten or in
peril or in pain.*

*That it has a fondness for the body, for finding its way toward flesh, for tracing
the edges of form, for shining forth through the eye, the hand, the heart.*

I cannot tell you how the light comes, but that it does.

That it will.

*That it works its way into the deepest dark that enfolds you,
though it may seem long ages in coming or arrive in a shape you did not
foresee.*

And so may we this day turn ourselves toward it.

May we lift our faces to let it find us.

May we bend our bodies to follow the arc it makes.

May we open and open more and open still to the blessed light that comes.

-- Jan Richardson

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH

adapted from Healing Liturgies

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

Leader:

We light this first candle 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.

All:

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.**

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” – John 14:27

Leader:

The second candle we light is to redeem the pain of loss; the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs with the security they bring, the loss of health in ourselves or in family members, the loss of joy and peace in our lives from the stresses which surround us. As we gather up the pain of the past we offer it to you, O God, asking that into our open hands you will place the gift of peace.

All:

**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, and order all things for and nigh;
to us the path of knowledge show and cause us in her ways to go.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

“I thought: My future is gone, as well as my hope from the Lord. The memory of my suffering and homelessness is bitterness and poison. I can’t help but remember and am depressed. I call all this to mind – therefore, I will wait. Certainly the faithful love of the Lord hasn’t ended; certainly God’s compassion isn’t through!” Lamentations 3:18-22

Leader:

We light this third candle 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.

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.

**O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer our spirits by thy justice here;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

"I raise my eyes toward the mountains. Where will my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. God won't let your foot slip. Your protector won't fall asleep on the job. No! Israel's protector never sleeps or rests. The Lord is your protector; the Lord is your shade right beside you." Psalm 121:1-5

Leader:

We light this fourth candle to remember faith, the gift of light and hope that God offers to us in the stories of Hanukkah and Christmas, which both also 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.

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.

**O come, Desire of nations bind all peoples in one heart and mind.
From dust thou brought us forth to life; deliver us from earthly strife.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

adapted from A Sanctified Art

God who always welcomes us home—
tonight is a long night.

We gather together heavy with prayer concerns.

They tumble out of our mouths,
they saturate every word we sing,
they lay over us like a quilt, weighing on our spirits.

We are a million combinations of weary and sad, lonely and grieving, angry and hurt.

It is obvious that we need you, so together we say. . .

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

God, we need you in the messy middles,
in the unclear paths forward, the transition seasons, and the splinterings of what once
was.

God, we need you in the grieving places,
in the dining rooms with empty chairs, in the empty wombs, and in the dark of the tomb.
God, we need you in our failed dreams,
in shame that rises quickly, in the unknown next steps, in the discernment that is always
easier said than done.

And so we say. . .

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

O come, Emmanuel.

Flood our grieving hearts.

Pour out your Spirit on this world.

Where there is suffering, loneliness, poverty, abuse, addiction, depression—be there.
Be all there.

Wrap your arms around those hurting places, and carry us to your promised day.

Until then, we will continue to pray using the words your son taught us, saying together,

Our Father...

INDIVIDUAL PRAYER AND REFLECTION

(Marcus – noodling or another song here OR I can find a recording to play)

adapted from A Sanctified Art

Having prayed together as a community, we now shift our attention to the individual prayers that weigh on our hearts. Bring people's attention to the piece of paper and pen they received when entering the space. Invite them to join you in a guided written prayer practice. Provide the following prompts, with space in between, inviting people to write their prayers in response.

Prayer Prompts

- Write five words that describe how you're feeling in this moment.
- Write down the names of people you carry in your heart today.
- Write down one area of your own life where you could use God's help, comfort, or guidance.
- Write down a prayer for your faith journey.
- Write down a prayer concern you have for our world.
- Take a minute to write any lingering prayers you have at this moment.

CANDLE LIGHTING

Having prayed together as a community individually and communally, take a few moments to ritualize the weight and significance of these prayers. Invite each individual to think of a person, incident, experience, or need in their life that they wish to lift up to God. Invite people to move forward to light a candle or two in honor of that prayer. Then, take a candle from the basket and light it from the advent wreath. Watch the room grow brighter as the light spreads.

CLOSING 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, sleep in heavenly peace.**

**Silent night, holy night, shepherds quake at the sight;
glories stream from heaven afar, heavenly hosts sing alleluia!
Christ the Savior is born, 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, Jesus, Lord at thy birth.**

BENEDICTION

The Holy One who heals all your iniquity bless and keep you;
the face of the One who heals all your afflictions
shine upon you and be gracious to you;
the light of the countenance of the One who redeems your life
be lifted upon you and give you peace. **Amen.**

-Adapted from Number 6:24-26

Go in peace. Love and serve Christ and one another.