

A Virtual Christmas Service of Healing and Hope – Leader Guide
By Rev. JoNell Lindh, First UMC Dallas

Music for Gathering

aura Brandenburg, *harpist*

Welcome

JoNell Lindh

Grace and Peace to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

This Christmas service of Healing and Hope invites you to take this time to breathe in peace and simply be in God's presence. The essence of our Christmas story is that God's light entered into the darkness of our everyday struggles to bring comfort and hope in the promise that we are not alone.

It is the most wonderful time of the year and for many of us it brings a complicated mess of emotions. If you have lived long enough to experience any loss, this time of year can also feel heavy. We may WANT to have a childlike sparkle about the joy of the season, but we are also sitting in grief, sadness, worry, regret, or whatever other emotions we have on our hearts. We might not even know what we are feeling, but we just feel “off”. It might even feel as though the door to the Inn has been shut to us as well as to Joseph and Mary.

A warm welcome to you who have made your way here. You are exactly where you are supposed to be. The noise of the world can be deafening and can block the heart experience of this season of hope, joy, and peace. So you've landed in a soft, safe place to just be still in the presence of the little Lord Jesus. May your feelings of stress or brokenness or loneliness or simply longing for a time of quiet be filled with peace and hope in our time together.

God isn't in the business of coming to us when everything is all nice and cleaned up and in order. God comes to the stable, where the manure smells like we would expect it to in the stables of our lives. The essence of the Christmas story that we celebrate, is that God's light entered into the darkness in order to bring light and love.

Welcome. Christmas comes for everyone.

I invite you to prayer

Heavenly Father, even though we've come here experiencing some darkness in our souls, or just yearning for some quiet time with you, we know you are a God of star and son. You created a world with darkness and light, and gave us the sun to warm us by day and stars to guide us by night. Even when we turn our backs on the light, you send midnight messengers who weave your words into our dreams and you stir up angelic choruses which surprise us with unexpected hope.

So now we come to lay aside the frenzied whirlwind of activity, to once again hear your small voice. We have come here by many paths, and the road this year has not always been smooth. We trust that we, with all humanity, will see God's salvation. "Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today." We offer our hearts as home to you, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Call to Worship

JoNell Lindh **Courtney Mitchell,**

Come, all who are wandering in darkness and doubt.

Christ is the Light of the World.

Come, all who are experiencing pain and grief.

Christ is the Prince of Peace.

Come, all who desire comfort, strength and new life.

Christ is the Good Shepherd.

Come, all who seek God's presence, grace and peace.

Christ is Emmanuel, God with us.

Call to Prayer

Courtney Mitchell

Friends in Christ, God knows our needs before we ask, and in our asking prepares us to receive the gift of grace. Let us open our lives to God's healing presence and confess to God in silence whatever has wounded us or brought injury to others, that we may receive mercy, healing, wholeness, and become for each other ministers of God's grace.

Silent pause

Pastoral Prayer, "Let us pray"

Loving God, how hard it is to wait, to wait for Christmas, to wait for the report from the doctor, to wait for a reply to our application to college, to wait for our soldiers to come home, to wait to hear our teenager's car in the driveway late at night.

May your grace encircle those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord; give rest to the weary, comfort the dying, have mercy for the suffering, celebrate with the joyous; and all for thy love's sake.

Forgive us for the smallness of our perspective, the limits of our imagination. Forgive us for accommodating society's pressure to consume, to compare, to conspire. Speak to us clearly in the middle of growing lists, stacks of boxes and long lines. Curb our holiday frenzy by the chorus of angels and the stillness of a silent night. And remind us of your great gift wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a feeding trough. Amen.

And now with the confidence of the children of God, let us pray.....

Our Father, which 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 forever.
Amen.

A Time of Stillness

Laura Brandenburg, *harpist*

Candle Lighting and Liturgy of Remembering

JoNell Lindh and Courtney Mitchell

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

JoNell...We remember that God's eternal love surrounds them all.

***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 time of silence

JoNell...We light this candle to redeem pain and loss; the loss of relationships, the loss of health, the loss of jobs, the loss of dreams, loss of faith, the loss of joy. We pause to gather up the pain of the past and offer it to you, O God, asking for the gift of God's peace.

Courtney...We remember that Christ comes to give us peace and new life.

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

A time of silence is kept

Courtney...We light this candle to remember and pray for ourselves in this Christmas time. We pause to remember our disbelief, and the times we have fallen short of your ways.

JoNell...We remember that Christ is the great comforter and healer.

***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 time of silence is kept

JoNell...We light this candle to remember our faith and the gift of hope which God offers to us in the Christmas story. We remember that God, who shares our life, promises to bring light to our darkness and healing to our pain.

Courtney...Let us remember Christ, who is the light in the darkness, showing us the way and leading us to new life.

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

A time of silence is kept

Scripture, Isaiah 11:1-3 and John 1:9-14
Reflection

Rev. JoNell Lindh

Litany of Grace,

Courtney and **JoNell**

I am the cattle shed
the ancient tale reports
is where the Christ was born;
**With all the smells
of such a place,**
especially in winter when
more than needing shoveling
and fresh hay underfoot;
**where silent, drowsy beasts
stood munching cud
or lay asleep protected
from the jaws of night.**

For I am earth,
created from the dust,
organic, decomposing;
**that one day I'll be
shoveled out as dust to dust,**
and that's okay,

for that's the way
of earth;
**and that's the locus,
too, of Jesus' birth:**
the Word made flesh
(for flesh is dust)
**was he who dwelled
among the likes of us,
on earth,**
quite full of Grace and Truth;
born in a cattle shed,
dust in the dust.

And born in me.

So I am holy dust:

I am the cattle shed.

"I am The Cattle Shed" by Rev. Wally Chapell,
from When I Listen, 1996

Silent Night

Laura Brandenburg, harp

Benediction

JoNell Lindh

May the love of the little Lord Jesus continue to dwell in our hearts as we step boldly into this Christmas season with hope and trust. We come anticipating even those small glimmers of hope. For unto us a child is born. Glory be to God on High! Amen

(This is our prayer In the name of the babe of Bethlehem, wrapped in swaddling clothes who came to dwell among us. Emmanuel. Amen.)

May your Christmas be Holy and the New Year be filled with God's love and hope.