

Blue Christmas 2017 Dec 17, 7:00 pm

The service begins in silence so all may participate in a time of reflection: May God help each of us to participate tonight and throughout the season as we are able.

Words of welcome

Opening Prayer

HWB# 191: "O Little Town of Bethlehem" verses **1 & 2**

A reading from Isaiah: Isaiah 40 (select verses)

"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 earth, 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."

HWB# 191: O Little Town of Bethlehem, verses **3 & 4**

A Responsive Reading from the Psalms: **Psalm 22**

ONE: 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.

ONE: 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.

ONE: 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 11:28-30

'Come to me, all you that are weary and are 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.'

There follows a time for silent reflection. During this time, baskets with pencils and the 'Christmas Stars of Remembrance' are distributed. You are invited to print the name(s) of those who have died or those with whom you are no longer in relationship whom you would like to be remembered this Christmas. They 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. *(Silent reflection follows)*

O come, o come Emmanuel, vs. 1

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. *(Silent reflection follows)*

O come, o come Emmanuel, vs. 2

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. *(Silent reflection follows)*

O come, o come Emmanuel, vs. 3

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. *(Silent reflection follows)*

O come, o come Emmanuel, vs. 4

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. *(Silent reflection follows)*

O come, o come Emmanuel, vs. 5

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. We also lift up 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. *(Silent reflection follows)*

O come, o come Emmanuel, vs. 6

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 make these short comings of right relationship 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. *(Silent reflection follows)*

O come, o come Emmanuel, vs. 7

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. *(Silent reflection follows)*

We ask all these things in the strong name of Jesus, and we join our voices together, in the words that Jesus gave us, saying:

All: The Lord's Prayer

HWB #204: Gloria

Benediction:

As we gather this evening, we embrace and claim the darkness that is present both in the world and in our own lives. As people who are familiar with the darkness, we also know that we gather to be illumined by the light of the Christ Child this Christmas season. May the Christ Child, born in a lowly stable, himself an outcast and marginal, bring light, comfort, peace, and joy this holiday season.

You are welcome to remain in the sanctuary in silence as long as you wish. As you leave the sanctuary, you are invited to come and pick up your Christmas Star of Remembrance and take it home.