

## Blue Christmas 2021

The Holiday Season is hard for those whose hearts are hurting. You are not alone. Blue Christmas is a gentle, contemplative service for those who are carrying pain or loss during this great season of celebration.

Tonight, we welcome you to our Blue Christmas service, *a service that has been put together especially for you who are not feeling particularly merry or bright right now. Coming out of many months of isolation and loneliness due to the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic, all of us know someone who has suffered loss or have lost someone ourselves. Many have been out of work for one reason or another related to the pandemic. Health concerns for many have worsened as well.*

*We will be using paper ornaments during this service to mark whatever causes us to feel blue during this holiday season. Please make sure you have both an ornament and something with which to write on it for later in the service.*

*If you have already placed an ornament on our blue Christmas tree, please feel free to do another one tonight. God understands that our concerns hit us at multiple times, and we want to give all of it to God.*

Let us now seek our gracious God for consolation and comfort.

**Hymn: "Precious Lord, Take My Hand" UMH #474**

## **Opening Liturgy**

**Leader:** The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God, and the fellowship  
of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**People:** **And also with you.**

**Leader:** The people who walked in darkness have seen a  
great light; on those who live in a land of  
deep shadow, a light has shone. For the yoke  
that was weighing upon them, and the burden  
upon their shoulders, you have broken in  
pieces, O God, our Redeemer.

*Let us pray:*

**God of mercy and love, we gather tonight as hurting  
people, bringing our pain, our sorrow, and our  
confusion before You.**

**Meet us in our darkness tonight, and give us the  
freedom to struggle together as we seek Your  
presence.**

**Almighty God, we ask for strength tonight, courage  
for tomorrow, and peace for past events that caused  
us so much loss and pain.**

**Lift up our hearts that our pain may turn to power,  
that our sorrow may turn to great spiritual  
discernment, and that our confusion may become  
greater faith through understanding Your will.**

**Through Your glorious Son, Christ Jesus our Lord.  
Amen.**

**Isaiah 40:1, 25-31 (NRSV)**

<sup>1</sup> Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.

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

<sup>26</sup> 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.

<sup>27</sup> 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”?

<sup>28</sup> 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.

<sup>29</sup> He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.

<sup>30</sup> Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted;

<sup>31</sup> 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.

*This is the Word of the Lord.*

**People:** Thanks be to God.

**Hymn:** “Wounded World that Cries for Healing” TFWS  
**#2177**

**Psalm 121** (UMH 844; if used, R.3)

- <sup>1</sup> I lift up my eyes to the hills.  
From whence does my help come?
- <sup>2</sup> **My help comes from the Lord,  
who made heaven and earth.**
- <sup>3</sup> The Lord will not let your foot be moved,  
the Lord who keeps you will not slumber.
- <sup>4</sup> **Behold, the One who keeps Israel will neither  
slumber nor sleep.**
- <sup>5</sup> The Lord is your keeper;  
**the Lord is your shade on your right hand.**
- <sup>6</sup> The sun shall not smite you by day,  
**nor the moon by night**
- <sup>7</sup> The Lord will keep you from all evil, and will keep  
your life.
- <sup>8</sup> **The Lord will keep your going out and your coming  
in from this time forth and for ever more.**

**Message**



picture from <https://gray-wymt-prod.cdn.arcpublishing.com>

*It was two weeks before Christmas. The happy holiday rush was on:*

- †** *Folks were scrambling to get everything done, like shopping, getting decorations up, and mailing the annual greeting cards.*

- † Christmas lights on many houses brightened the night, twinkling merrily.
- † Many people were working overtime to afford {food for the holiday meal and the gifts they bought to give loved ones}.



picture screencaptured from  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9NIp62BBfzM>

Then the weather hit; what had been deemed a slight risk two days earlier and upgraded to a moderate risk in the morning became a devastating force that evening, as sixty-six (66) confirmed tornadoes swept across the midwest U.S.

- † The Christmas lights went out along with power and other utilities in much of the region.
- † Decorations became part of the swirling debris as homes were shredded, leaving thousands homeless.
- † Workplaces were destroyed with workers inside; still trying to meet production deadlines, scores were trapped until rescuers could free them.
- † Eighty-nine (89) people were killed and many times that number were injured.



picture screencaptured from  
<https://www.kait8.com/video/2021/12/11/december-tornado-outbreak-aftermath-part-2/>

Those communities are not having the Merry Christmas celebrations they expected just a fortnight ago. So many people experienced terrible tragedy that evening, it boggles the mind. And yet, theirs is not the only circumstance causing grief in this season.

Just as there are many different types of ornaments to hang on a Christmas tree, there are many different causes for grief or sadness. Each of us here tonight has our own reasons for feeling blue during the holidays. Some may feel lost in an intense storm, while others feel like they are drowning in a quiet sea of emotion that is overwhelming them.



picture created from video  
screencapture with overlay of shapes

We are not meant to deal with all of it alone. God is with us, walks with us, and calls for us to turn our troubles over to the Almighty, the One who can deal with all of it and lead our souls to renewal.

Let us now read that call responsively from the Gospel of

## **Matthew 11:28-30**

<sup>28</sup> 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens,

**and I will give you rest.**

<sup>29</sup> 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.

<sup>30</sup> **For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'**

*Leader: The Word of the Lord.*

*People: Thanks be to God.*

*Hymn: "Star Child" TFWS #2095 verse 1*

## **A Liturgy of Remembrance**

### *Lighting of Candle #1*

The first candle we light is to remember those persons whom we have loved and lost.

Let us pause to remember their name, their voice, their face,

the memory that binds them to us in this season.

We hold them before God, giving thanks for their lives in ours.

*Please take a moment to remember those who have died. I invite you to name them, aloud or in the silence of your hearts, and to write their names on your ornaments as we light the first candle.*

*<Light the first candle>*

*Let us pray:*

Thank you for the gift each of these people has been in our lives. We want to believe that we will celebrate the treasure of love with them again, when we are all in your presence forever. May this truth sustain us in the days to come.

Take our sad and aching hearts and comfort us. Comfort us, for we only feel hollowness and emptiness. God of sorrowing, draw near! Amen.

*Hymn: "Star Child" TFWS #2095 verse 2*

### *Lighting of Candle #2*

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, the loss and loneliness we experience when our loved ones do not share our faith.

As we gather up the pain of the past, we open our hands to offer it to you, O God, and ask for the gift of peace in their place.

*Please take a moment to remember the losses. I invite you to name them, aloud or in the silence of your hearts, and to write them on your ornaments as we light the second candle.*

*<Light the second candle>*

*Let us pray:*



God of mystery, we turn our hearts to you.

We come before you in need of peace, grateful for the mystery of life and ever keenly aware of your promises of guidance and protection. We want to place our trust in you, but our hearts grow fearful and anxious.

We forget so easily that you will be with us in all that we experience. Teach us to be patient with the transformation of our lives and to be open to the changes which we are now going through. Amen.

*Hymn: "Star Child" TFWS #2095 verse 3*

### *Lighting of Candle #3*

The third candle we light is for those who experience a loss of direction in their lives.

God of the Exodus, you led Moses and your people through the wilderness to a new land.

We want so much to have a sense of direction, to know where we are and where we ought to be headed. But the confusion, fear, and the questions stay.

You ask us to be full of faith, to believe deep within that you are our signpost, that you are our wisdom and our guide, and to trust in your presence.

Your words to us are clear: "Do not fear, I go before you."

*If you have experienced loss of direction, you are invited to describe it on your ornament as we light the third candle.*

*<Light the third candle>*

*Let us pray:*

God of our depths, we cry out to you to be our guide.  
Hear our prayer.

Help us to have a strong sense of inner direction and  
grant that we may have the reassurance of knowing  
that we are on the right path.

Take our lives and use them according to your will.  
Take all that is lost in us and bring it home with  
you. Amen.

*Hymn: "Star Child" TFWS #2095 verse 4*

#### *Lighting of Candle #4*

The fourth candle we light is a sign of hope, the  
hope that the Christmas story offers to us.

We remember that God, who shares our life, promises  
us a place and time of no more pain and suffering.

*If you are suffering and in need of hope, you are  
invited to write about it on your ornament as we  
light the fourth candle.*

*<Light the fourth candle>*

*Let us pray:*

O God whose spirit is known by those whose hearts are  
thankful, and who makes cheerfulness a companion of  
strength, lift up our hearts, we pray, to a joyous  
confidence in your care.

Guide us when we cannot see the way.

Teach us to know that a shadow is only a shadow because the light of eternal goodness shines behind the object of our fears.

Where there is love in life, teach us to find it; help us to trust it and enable us to grow in the power of love.

So may our lives bring comfort and encouragement to others. We ask it, in the name of Jesus Christ whose life is our light. Amen.

*Hymn: "Star Child" TFWS #2095 verse 5*

### *Hanging of the Ornaments*

Each of us comes bearing our own hurts, sorrows, broken places. I want to invite each of you to offer your personal wound to the God who loves each of us deeply and wants to carry our pain.

God waits patiently, gently calling out: "Give me your pain, come to me... all who labor and are heavy laden, I will refresh you!"

I invite each of you to come forward and place your ornament on the blue Christmas tree; *those at home may hang their ornaments in a place special to them.* In this way we are giving what weighs heavily on our hearts to our Savior.

As you hang your ornament, remember that it is God who carries us through our troubles, brings light into our darkness, and holds us close until we are renewed for lift in God's kingdom.

*<Hanging ornaments>*

*Let us pray:*

Gracious and omniscient God, you know what each individual ornament means to the one who placed it.

Please take the pain away and refresh our souls, that we may again know you as our renewing Creator, restoring us in your peace and love.

Let us not forget the past, but rather cherish memories that build us into stronger people as we move forward in your grace. Amen.

Leader: These ornaments on the tree are only symbols, but as we commit them to God, we remember that suffering passes, though memory remains forever.

May the hope of the Christ Child sustain us through this season.

People: That together we may be renewed to grow in life again. Amen.

*Hymn: "Silent Night" UMH #239*

### **Closing**

As we gathered this evening, we embraced and claimed the sadness, pain, and heaviness of heart that is present both in the world and in our own lives.

As people who are familiar with heaviness of heart, we also know that we gathered to be uplifted by the love of the Christ Child this Christmas season.

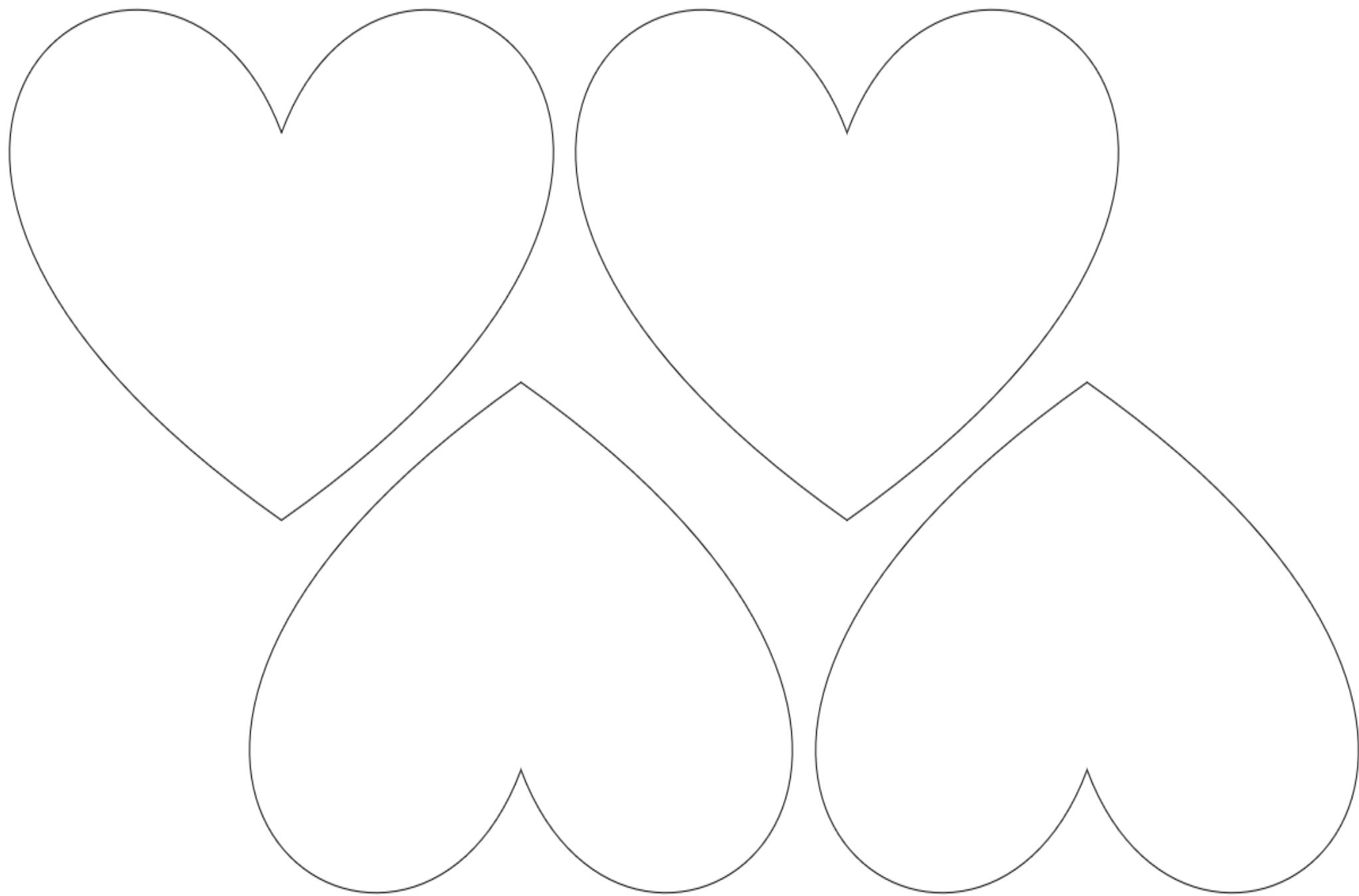
May the Christ Child, born in a lowly stable, himself an outcast, bring light, comfort, peace, and joy this holiday season.

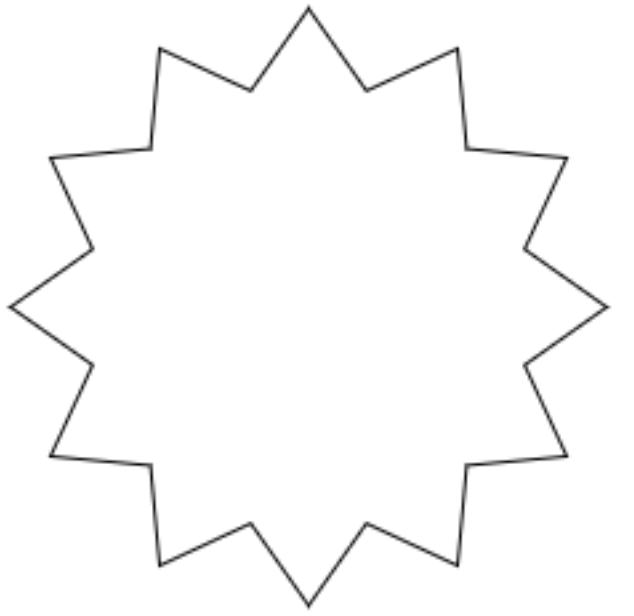
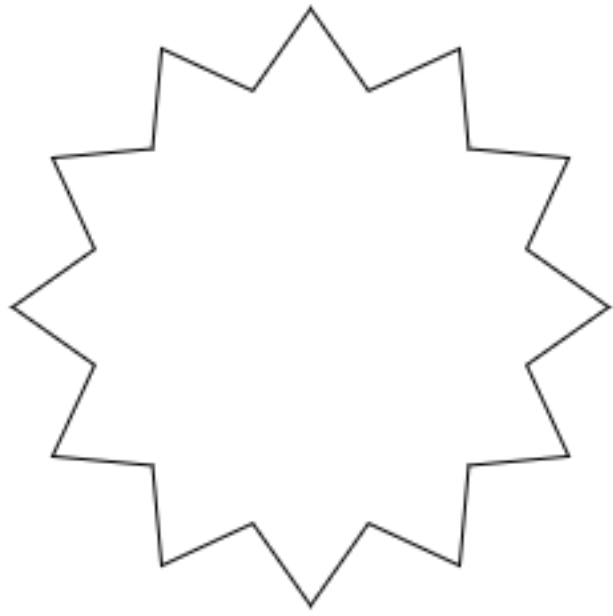
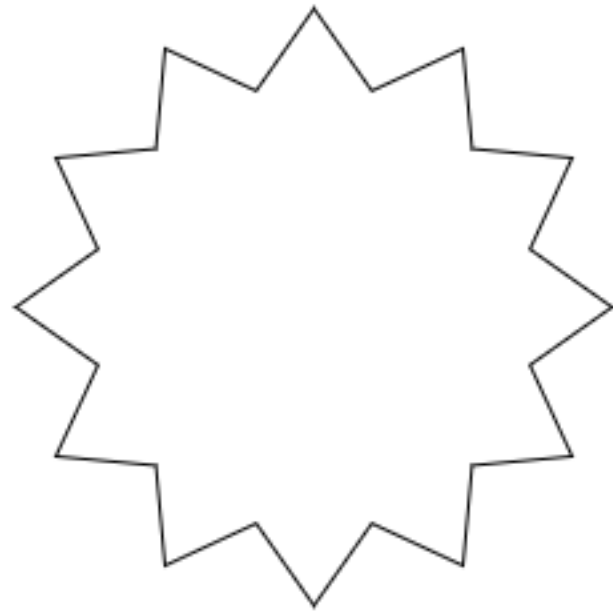
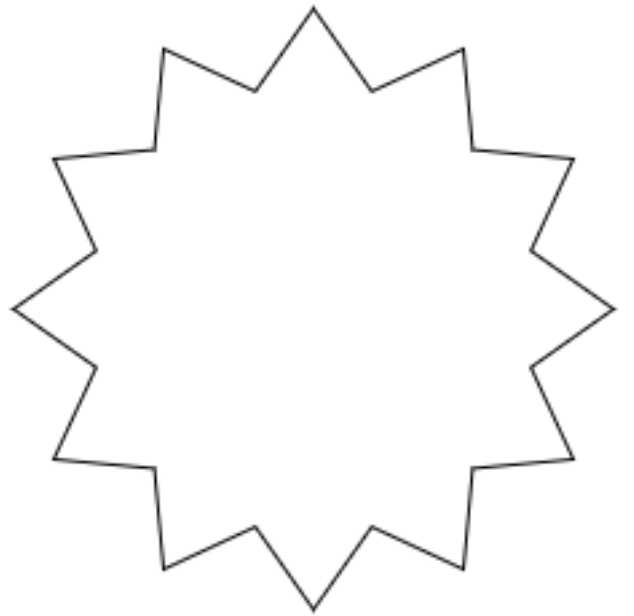
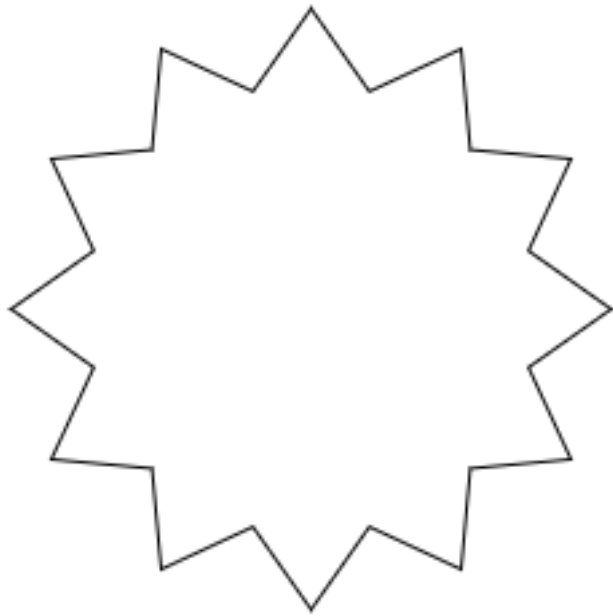
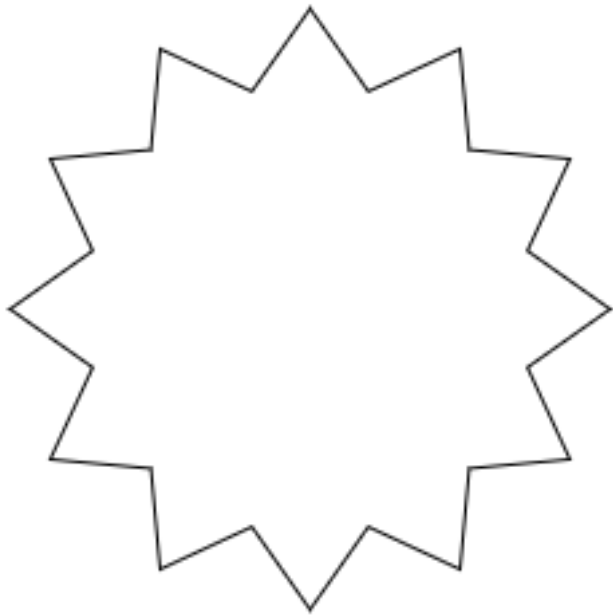
Go in peace and know the love of Jesus goes with you always. Amen.

*As you leave, you are invited to take a heart ornament with you, representing the Love of God carrying your burden with new hope.*

*If you wish to, you may write on it what God has placed upon your heart (or what you hope for from God) as relief, restoration, or renewal following your giving your burden to God.*

*Special thanks to Becky Guthrie and Gary Spraker for prayers and liturgy used in the service upon which this was based.*





*I left the Battlefield of Anger  
To enter the Playground of Love  
I laid down my Shield of Fear  
To pick up a mantle of Compassion  
In this new Land, as a Child of God  
Among my brothers and sisters  
We seek to Love one another in Harmony  
With Humility, Joy and Passion  
Peace and Serenity  
I still stumbled upon choices  
I don't want to draw my bow anymore  
Aiming arrows coated with Resentment  
My utmost choice is Love  
To not retaliate, to forgive  
My old painful wounds ache sometimes  
It hurts  
I need more time to heal, to mature, to grow  
I pray I will see you and you will see me  
In this wonderful Kingdom*

*- Mathilda MacKenzie*

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