

Blue Christmas 2022

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. 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. Health concerns for many have worsened as well with the triple threat of flu, covid, and RSV.*

We will be using dark blue and white ribbons during this service to mark whatever causes us to feel blue during this holiday season and our hopes for the future. Please make sure you have one or more of each of those color ribbons and something with which to write on them for later in the service.

If you have already placed ribbons on our blue Christmas tree, please feel free to do more 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)

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.

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)

¹ I lift up my eyes to the hills.
From whence does my help come?

- 2 My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.
- 3 The Lord will not let your foot be moved,
the Lord who keeps you will not slumber.
- 4 Behold, the One who keeps Israel will neither
slumber nor sleep.
- 5 The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade on your right hand.
- 6 The sun shall not smite you by day,
nor the moon by night
- 7 The Lord will keep you from all evil, and will keep
your life.
- 8 The Lord will keep your going out and your coming
in from this time forth and for ever more.

Message



picture from <https://www.cnyhomepage.com/news/Local-news/chobani-donates-ambulance-to-village-of-sherburne/>

He was twenty-eight years old, an eagle scout, a college graduate, an artist; he had returned to his childhood hometown to help with the family business. He had settled down with his companion and her two boys, planning a full life. Then illness struck.

He developed difficulty breathing and collapsed at home. Family members and nearby police started CPR before the ambulance arrived, but to no avail; the ambulance crew were unable to revive him. His promising young life was cut short, leaving grieving family and friends bereft; no parent should ever have

to bury a child. Then his parents' marriage became a casualty of their mourning, a further loss for them.



picture from

<https://store.optum.com/shop/products/medline-wheelchair-swing-back-desk-arm-swing-leg-rest/>

As a young mother, she never expected the stroke that debilitated her. At first, there was more hope for recovery, but as time progressed and she remained wheelchair bound and unable to speak, hope dwindled. The stress on her family became huge, too, as they grew exhausted trying to take care of her during delays in getting home health assistance. She longs to be able to do as she used to, to go over to her children and husband, wrap her arms around them, and tell them she loves them.



picture from <https://www.gofundme.com/f/jujfnz-house-fire>

They had been settled in their home for some time; their kids were now grown and on their own. They figured they were secure for retirement. Then, early one morning, they scrambled to get out when the house was on fire. Their home and all their belongings were lost, just as winter was about to begin.

Those people are not having the Merry Christmas celebrations they expected just a short while ago. And yet, theirs are not the only circumstances causing grief in this season. So many people

experience terrible tragedy in so many different ways that it boggles the mind.

Just as there are many different ways to tie a ribbon 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
screenshot 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

²⁸ ‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens,

and I will give you rest.

²⁹ 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.

³⁰ 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 dark blue ribbons 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, 0 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 dark blue ribbons 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 dark blue ribbons 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 dark blue ribbons as we light the fourth candle.

All here are also invited to write on your white ribbons what you hope for the future (as best you can look ahead), to write on them those things for which you ask God to help you toward in your ongoing life's journey.

<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

Tying of the Ribbons

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 tie your *blue and white* ribbons on the blue Christmas tree; *those at home may arrange their ribbons in a place special to them*. In this way we are giving what weighs heavily on our hearts to our Savior, asking God to help us move forward from here.

As you tie your ribbons, 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 life in God's kingdom.

<Tying ribbons>

Let us pray:

Gracious and omniscient God, you know what each individual ribbon 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 ribbons 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 any darkness we experience 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 light blue ribbon with you, representing the Christ child, born in the love of God to carry 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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