

Blue Christmas Service

Call to Worship

Officiant: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

***People:* All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.**

Officiant: In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

***People:* The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.** (John 1:1-5)

Welcome

O Little Town of Bethlehem

Sung by all, standing as you are able.

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie;
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love
O morning stars together, proclaim the holy birth
And praises sing to God the King, and peace to men on earth.

How silently, how silently, the wondrous Gift is given;
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.
No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin
Where meek souls will receive him still, the dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray
Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us this day
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel.

(You may be seated.)

The First Reading: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

- ² a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
- ³ a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
- ⁴ a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
- ⁵ a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
- ⁶ a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
- ⁷ a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
- ⁸ a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.

Officiant: (choose one of the following)

Psalm 22

(Read the boldface verses together.)

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?
**O my God, I cry by day but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.**

In you, our ancestors trusted. They trusted and you delivered them.
**It was you who brought me from the womb,
you who kept me safe on my mother's breast.
Since my mother bore me, you have been my God.**

Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.
**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.**

Psalm 22:1-2, 4, 9-11, 24

Psalm 23

(Reading together.)

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

³ He restores my soul.

**He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.**

⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil,

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff,

they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

(Musical Interlude, if desired)

The Second Reading: Isaiah 40:1-5

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,

and cry to her

that her warfare is ended,

that her iniquity is pardoned,

that she has received from the Lord's hand

double for all her sins.

³ A voice cries:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord;

make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up,

and every mountain and hill be made low;

the uneven ground shall become level,

and the rough places a plain.
5 And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

Litany of Remembrance

The first candle of Remembrance is lighted.

Officiant: We light this first candle to remember those whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember what made them so special to us. 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.

A period of silent reflection

(Singing together)

**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!**

The second candle of Comfort is lighted.

Officiant: We light this second candle to remember the pain of loss: loss of relationships, loss of trust, losses from storms, loss of jobs, loss of health, loss of faith, the loss of joy. We acknowledge and embrace the pain of the past, O God, and we offer it to You, asking that into our wounded hearts and open hands You will place the gift of peace, *shalom*.

**All: We remember that through You all things are possible.
Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into Your future.**

A period of silent reflection

(Singing together)

O come, thou Wisdom from on high,

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

The third candle of Healing is lighted.

Officiant: We light this third candle in self-reflection 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. We believe in your faithfulness Lord. Help our unbelief.

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. We remember that though winter be upon us and the night be dark, You will bring the dawn, and light defeats the darkness.

A period of silent reflection

(Singing together)

**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!**

The fourth candle of Hope is lighted.

Officiant: We light this fourth candle to remember Hope: The gift of light that God offers to us through the birth of his Son, Jesus, who was born in poverty, uncertainty, insecurity, and humbleness in a stable.

We remember that the loving God who came to share this life with us, promises us comfort and peace. Have mercy on us, O Lord.

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.

A period of silent reflection.

(Singing together)

**O come, desire of nations, bind
All peoples in one heart and mind.
Bid envy, strife, and quarrels cease;
Fill the whole world with heaven's peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!**

The Prayers of the People

(Sitting or kneeling as you are able.)

God of wisdom, we come to you this Christmas Season tired, in turmoil, and in pain. As the nights have grown longer, so has darkness grown and wrapped itself around our hearts. In this season of longest night, we ask your healing blessings upon all that we carry in our hearts - sorrow we fear may never end, wounds we cannot even put into words.

Lord, in your mercy:

Hear our prayer.

Leader: God of mercy and compassion, there are those among us who are grieving over what might have been. Encourage us as we sometimes walk in darkness. Death or loss or terrible hurt has changed our experience of Christmas.

We remember that once it was a special day for us, too, but someone or something precious has gone away from us in this life. We have lost a beloved, a job, a goal, a cause, a dream. We find ourselves adrift and alone. We are weary from the journey, and we have found no room at the inn. We come to you seeking rest, and peace, and shelter from the storms in life.

Lord, in your mercy:

Hear our prayer.

Leader: God of grace, in the spirit of the season, grant us all that we need to comfort us as we journey through this Christmas season.

We ask that you shelter and sustain all those of us, both here and throughout the world, who wander or want or weep or are heavy laden, that we may be lifted up in courage and journey on in the peace which passes understanding. O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.

Lord, in your mercy:
Hear our prayer.

Leader: God of love, in this Christmas Season we embrace and offer up to you all that used to be which is now lost to us and cannot be again. With celebration all around us, memories of what was, and fears of what may be, weigh heavy on our hearts. Help us find joy again, even in the pain. Please hold us close in your embrace, be near to us this night, and in the days to come, until the light returns and morning comes.

Lord, in your mercy:
Hear our prayer.

Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for your love's sake. Amen.

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear
Sung by all, standing as you are able.

It came upon the midnight clear, that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth to touch their harps of gold:
"Peace on the earth, good will to men, from heaven's all-gracious King."
The world in solemn stillness lay, to hear the angels sing.

Gospel Reading: John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

⁹The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹²But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he

gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Homily

A period of silent reflection.

Prayer

(Stand as you are able.)

Let us pray.

All: Almighty God, we thank you for your constant love and for the blessings of this day. We know that even when we cannot see or feel you, still you are there.

Lord Jesus, stay with us, for evening is at hand and the day is past; be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope, that we may know you as you are revealed in Scripture and the breaking of bread. Grant this for the sake of your love. **Amen.**

Lighten our darkness, we beseech you, O Lord; and by your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of your only Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world: Grant that your people, illumined by your Word and Sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshiped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit live and reigns, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

(You may be seated.)

Lighting Candles of Love and Peace

You are invited to come forward to light a candle symbolizing your prayers.

Prayer ministers are available to pray with you for specific needs or to anoint you with oil as you are lead.

Musical Interlude

Stay with Us

Jon Hermanson

<https://beckenhorstpress.com/stay-with-us>

Stay with us, Lord Jesus, stay with us.
Stay with us, it soon is evening and night is falling.
The darkness deepens; with us abide.
In life and death, Lord, with us abide.
Stay with us, Lord Jesus stay with us;
It soon is evening, and night is falling.

Concluding Prayers

(Standing as you are able.)

Let us pray.

Be present, O merciful God, and protect us through the hours of this night, so that we who are wearied by the changes and chances of this life may rest in your eternal changelessness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be they 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 this is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory, forever. Amen.**

Officiant:(choose one of the following)

O Lord, support us all the day long through this trouble-filled life, until the shadows lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then Lord, in your mercy, grant us safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last. **Amen.**

Heavenly Father, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you: Look with compassion upon the heartfelt desires of your servants, and purify our disordered affections, that we may behold your eternal glory in the face of Christ Jesus; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

This is another day, O Lord.

We do not know what it will bring forth, but make us ready, Lord, for whatever it may be. If we are to stand up, help us to stand bravely. If we are to sit still, help us to sit quietly. If we are to lie low, help us to do it patiently. And if we are to do nothing, help us to do it gallantly. Make these words more than words and give us the Spirit of Jesus. Amen.

Blessing and Dismissal

Officiant: “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever.” **Amen.**

Jude 1:24-25

*You are invited to remain in this sacred space for prayer and meditation.
Prayer ministers are available to pray with you at either side door.*

Please depart in silence.

Adapted from the Cathedral Church of St. Andrew, Honolulu, Hawaii.
Many prayers from ACNA BCP2019.