



ST. THOMAS
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

We, the baptized ministers,
declare Christ's Mission for us:
to grow as a Church
in the spiritual strength
of community, and
to care, reach out, and
include all people in Christ's love.

A Blue Christmas Service



Wednesday, December 21, 2022

7:30 PM

The Gathering of the People

The congregation stands.

Welcome to this Blue Christmas service, a time when we can, in company with each other, acknowledge the sadness we feel at Christmas time. This is the time of the shortest day and longest night of the year, when memories of past experiences and the pain of present reality can become overwhelming. Recognizing that this is not a season of joy for everyone, in this service we will be invited to reflect on the pain, the loneliness, and the sorrow we may feel and offer it all to our great sign of hope, the Holy Child of Bethlehem. We pray that all of us will find hope and comfort in knowing that we are not alone.

Opening Acclamation

For you, O God, our souls in silence wait.

Truly our hope is in you.

If I say, "Surely the darkness will cover me, and the light around me turn to night,"

darkness is not dark to you, O Lord; the night is as bright as the day;

darkness and light to you are both alike.

Psalm 139:10-11

Opening Hymn

Signs of endings all around us

#721 Wonder, Love, and Praise

1. Signs of end-ings all a-round us—dark-ness, death, and win-ter days
 2. Can it be that from our end-ings, new be-gin-nings you cre-ate?
 3. Speak, O God, your Word a-mong us. Bar-ren lives your pres-ence fill.

shroud our lives in fear and sad-ness, numb-ing mouths that long to praise.
 Life from death, and from our rend-ings, realms of whole-ness gen-er-ate?
 Swell our hearts with songs of glad-ness, ter-rors calm fore-bod-ings still.

Come, O³ Christ, and dwell a - mong us! Hear our cries, come set us free.
 Take our fears, then, Lord, and turn them in - to hopes for life a - new:
 Let your prom - ised realm of jus - tice blos - som now through-out the earth;
 Give us hope and faith and glad - ness. Show us what there yet can be.
 Fad - ing light and dy - ing sea - son sing their Glo - ri - as to you.
 your do - min - ion bring now near us; we a - wait the sav - ing birth.

Words: Dean W. Nelson (b. 1944). Music: *Ton-y-Botel*, Thomas John Williams (1869-1944).

Collect for Advent

Let us pray.

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Lessons

A Reading from Isaiah 9:2-7

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor,

Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Advent Canticle of Lament *(read responsively, congregation in bold)*

Lord, we look with hope for the day
when there is no more grief,

**no more sorrow,
no more sin,
no more death.**

When you return, there will be no sickness,

**no more weakness,
no more anxiety,
no more failing strength,**

but we will be made complete.

We will see you,

and our souls will overflow with joy, worship, and blessings.

Here, we see things darkly,

**our hopes are obscured by the suffering that surrounds us
and by the sinful longings of our own hearts.**

We prefer comfort to holiness

**and our hopes are set on temporary material things,
rather than eternal promises.**

Give us a hunger for heaven

by opening our eyes to how far we are from home.

Show us how unsatisfying this world is,

**so we can find satisfaction in the Gospel
and cling to Christ alone. Amen.**

— written by Mike Cospers, and posted on The Open Sourcebook website.

Matthew 11:28-29; 28:20b

“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... And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Affirmation of Faith *(standing as you are able)*

Officiant Let us declare our faith in God.

**We believe in God, the Father,
from whom every family
in heaven and on earth is named.
We believe in God the Son,
who lives in our hearts through faith,
and fills us with his love.
We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens us
with power from on high.
We believe in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.**

(cf Ephesians 3, Affirmation of Faith from Common Worship of the Church of England)

Litany of Remembrance and Advent Candle Lighting

First Candle

We light this candle to remember those persons who have been loved and lost. We pause in silence to remember their names, their faces, their voices.

Silence

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.

We remember them with love. May God's eternal love surround them.

Second Candle

We light this second candle to remember the pain of loss: loss of relationships, loss of trust, loss of jobs, loss of health, loss of faith, the loss of joy.

Silence

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.

We remember that through You all things are possible. Refresh, restore, and renew us, O God.

Third Candle

We light this third candle to remember ourselves this Christmas time. We pause and remember the past weeks, months, and for some of us years, that have been heavy with our burdens.

Silence

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 remember that dawn defeats the darkness.

Fourth Candle

We light this fourth candle to remember faith, the gift of light and hope that God offers to us in the story of Christmas.

Silence

We remember that the loving God who came to share this life with us promises us comfort and peace.

We remember the One who shares our burdens, who shows us the way to the Light, and who journeys the way with us.

Hymn

In the bleak midwinter

#112 Blue Hymnal



1 In the bleak mid - win - ter, frost - y wind made moan,
2 Our God, heaven can - not hold him, nor — earth sus - tain;
3 An - gels and arch - an - gels may have gath - ered there,
4 What — can I give him, poor — as I am?



earth stood hard as i - ron, wa - ter like a stone;
heaven and earth shall flee a - way when he comes to reign:
cher - u - bim and se - ra - phim throng - ed the air;
If I were a shep - herd, I would bring a lamb;

snow had fal - len, snow on snow, snow — on — snow,
in the bleak mid - win - ter a sta - ble - place suf - ficed
but his mo - ther on - ly, in her maid - en bliss,
if I were a wise - man, I would do my part;

in the bleak mid - win - ter, long a - go.
the Lord — God in - car - nate, Je - sus Christ.
wor - shiped the be - lov - ed with a kiss.
yet what I can I give him — give my heart.

Words: Christina Rossetti (1830-1894). Music: *Cranham*, Gustav Theodore Holst (1874-1934).

Prayer for the Night

The New Zealand Prayerbook, p. 184

Let us pray together.

Lord, it is night.

The night is for stillness.

Let us be still in the presence of God.

It is night after a long day.

What has been done has been done;
what has not been done has not been done;
let it be.

The night is dark.

Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of our own lives rest in you.

The night is quiet.

Let the quietness of your peace enfold us,
all dear to us, and all who have no peace.

The night heralds the dawn.

Let us look expectantly to a new day, new joys, new possibilities.

In your name we pray.

Amen.

The Blessing

May Christ, who by his Incarnation gathered into one, things earthly and heavenly, fill us with his joy and peace; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be amongst us this night, and remain with us always. **Amen.**

Hymn *Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus*

#66 Blue Hymnal

1 Come, thou long - ex - spect - ed Je - sus, born to set thy peo - ple free;
2 Is - rael's strength and con - so - la - tion, hope of all the earth thou art:
3 Born thy peo - ple to de - liv - er, born a child, and yet a king,
4 By thine own e - ter - nal Spi - rit rule in all our hearts a - lone;

from our fears and sins re - lease us, let us find our rest in thee.
dear de - sire of ev - ery na - tion, joy of ev - ery long - ing heart.
born to reign in us for ev - er, now thy gra - cious king - dom bring.
by thine all - suf - fi - cient mer - it raise us to thy glo - rious throne.

The musical score consists of two systems. Each system has a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment line (bass clef). The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor), and the time signature is common time (C). The lyrics are printed below the vocal line.

Words: Charles Wesley (1707-1788) Music: *Stuttgart*, melody from *Psalmodia Sacra, oder Andächtige und Schöne Gesänge*, 1715; adapt. and harm. William Henry Havergal (1793-1870), alt.

The Dismissal

Go forth in the name of the promised Christ.

Thanks be to God.

Postlude *Stille Nacht*

Mark Schweizer