



**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



**Tuesday December 17, 2024**  
**7:30 PM**

*Welcome to this Blue Christmas, a time when we can, with others, acknowledge the "blue" feelings we have at Christmas time, the reasons for them, and offer them to God. This time has been called the "long dark night of the soul" and "the winter of our discontent" in which memories of past experiences and the pain of present experiences can become overwhelming. For some, Christmas Day is the most difficult. For others, it may be Christmas Eve, or New Years Eve, or the beginning of another lonely New Year. In this service, we'll have some singing appropriate to the season, recognizing that this is not a season of joy for everyone. We will invite you to reflect on the pain, the loneliness, and the sadness you may feel and offer it to God for healing and transformation. We pray that you will find hope and comfort in knowing that you are not alone. Always remember that God knows your pain and loves you unconditionally.*

**Prelude** Improvisations on *Lo How A Rose*

**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** *Come Thou Long Expected Jesus*

#66 Sung to #460 Hyfrydol

Let us pray.

God of abundant mercy, you have given us grace to pray with one heart and one voice, even though our hearts are broken and our voices tremble with grief and sorrow.

Comfort, comfort, Lord, your Holy people. Comfort those of us who sit in darkness, mourning 'neath our sorrow's load. Speak to us of the peace that awaits us, of the balm of healing for our weary and wounded souls. We ask all this, trusting in the promise you have made to hear the prayers of two or three who have gathered in the Name of your Holy Child, Jesus. **Amen.**

**A reading from the book of Ecclesiastes (3:1-8)**

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

*A brief silence is kept.*

**Lighting the First Candle**

We light the first candle to remember those persons whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember their names, their faces, their voices. You may name them now, either silently or aloud. [*pause*]

We give thanks for the memory that binds them to us this season which anticipates Christmas. May God’s eternal love surround them.

*The first candle is lit.*



**A Reading from the prophet Isaiah (40:1, 3-8):**

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. A voice cries out: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 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. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” A voice says, “Cry out!” And I said, “What shall I cry?” All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

*A brief silence is kept.*

**Lighting the Second Candle**

We light the second candle to redeem the pain of loss: the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, the loss of health. We name those losses now, either silently or aloud. [*pause*] As we gather up the pain of the past, we offer it to you, O God, asking that into our open hands you will place the gift of peace. Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into your future.

*The second candle is lit.*



**A reading from the Gospel of 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.  
The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

*A brief silence is kept.*

**Lighting the Third Candle**

We light the third candle to remember ourselves this Christmas time. We pause and remember the past weeks, months, and for some of us, years of difficult times. We remember the poignancy of memories, the grief, the sadness, the hurts, the pain of reflecting on our own mortality. We name those hurts and challenges now, either silently or aloud. [*pause*] Let us remember that light defeats darkness.

*The third candle is lit.*



**A reading from the Gospel of John (1:1-5, 14):**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.  
The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

*A brief silence is kept.*

## Lighting the Fourth Candle

We light the fourth candle to remember our faith and the gift of hope which God offers to us in the Christmas story. We remember that God, who shares our life, also promises us a place and time where pain and suffering will be no more. Let us remember the one who shows the way and who goes with us into our tomorrows.

*The fourth candle is lit.*



Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.  
Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!

## A reading from John of the Cross "Even in the Night"

Surely I know the spring that  
swiftly flows

**Even during the night.**

That everlasting spring is deeply  
hidden, but surely I know the  
place where it begins,

**Even during the night.**

I don't know its source, because it  
has none. But I know that all  
beginnings come from this one,

**Even during the night.**

I do know that nothing can equal  
its beauty and that from it both  
heaven and earth drink

**Even during the night.**

I know there is no limit to its  
depth, and that no one can wade  
across its breadth,

**Even during the night.**

Its brightness is never clouded  
over, and I know that from it all  
light flows,

**Even during the night.**

I know its current is so forceful  
that it floods the nations, heaven,  
and hell

**Even during the night.**

The current that is born of this  
stream, I know, is powerful and  
strong

**Even during the night.**

The living stream that I so desire, I  
see in the bread of life,

**Even during the night.**

**Hymn** *In the bleak midwinter*

#112, 1982 Hymnal

**Homily**

Rev. Fran Gardner-Smith

**Affirmation of Faith**

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.**

*after Ephesians 3, from Common Worship of the Church of England*

**Hymn:** *Be Not Afraid*

Wonder Love and Praise #811

**Prayer for the Night**

*The New Zealand Prayerbook*

**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.**

**Closing Hymn** *Signs of Endings All Around Us*

Wonder Love and Praise #721

**The Dismissal**

Go forth in the name of the promised Christ.

**Thanks be to God.**

Postlude *Stille Nacht*

Mark Schweitzer