**“It’s A Blue Christmas - A Service of Wholeness and Healing”**

Welcome to this service, in which we will pray for wholeness and healing. For ourselves, those close to us, and for this world.

Ordinarily, a healing and wholeness type of service might include anointing with oil or coming forward to light a candle. In the interest of mitigating chance of illness, we will be collecting those prayer requests of yours. Maybe next year we can expand it more.

I wish to draw your attention to the insert in your worship bulletin. You are invited, using the pens or pencils in your pew, to let us know what prayers we should lift up for you, or if you are in need of a call from me for a little one-on-one pastoral care. Sometime before the end of the sermon, please fill it out and if you wish for us to pray for you. After a while, Linda will come around and collect them from you.

**Harp prelude**

**Call to Worship**

Today we come looking for the Christ Child.

We come, bringing our hurts, our worries, our fears.

**We come seeking relief from pain.**

With the psalmist of old we say, “O Lord, you are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.

**Give heed to my cry, for I am brought very low.”**

Hymn “Abide with Me” RH #64

**Call to Confession**

Recognizing our need for true peace,
both with others and within our own selves,
let us confess those ways we have distanced ourselves from God.

**Prayer of Confession**

Dear Lord, we come to you this day to express our failures and confusion regarding our relationship with you:

**You know that we come to you with heavy hearts that we find hard to unburden. It is particularly in this time of year when the darkness of long solstice nights collides with the brilliance of Christmas lights, that we find it hard to express our losses.**

**Open us to the understanding that you are the source of all love and we need not feel so alone in our grief. Grant us wisdom to know that you— most of all—can be trusted, and that you are with us, especially when we are at our absolute worst.** (silence) Amen.

**Assurance of Pardon** Let us open our lives to God’s healing presence and receive our Lord’s acceptance of us!

We know, God of Love, that you are always with us even in our very darkest of times. We know that you forgive our many transgressions and that by leaning into your infinite patience and strength, we receive your mercy, your care, and your grace today. Amen.

**Special Music “Cold December’s Winds“ Kenna McKenzie-Young, Harp**

**Hearing the Word**

**Psalm 142**

**Old Testament Isaiah 40: 1-5; 28-31**

Comfort, O comfort my people,
    says your God.
**2**Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
    and cry to her
that she has served her term,
    that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the Lord’s hand
    double for all her sins.

**3**A voice cries out:
“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**Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
    and all people shall see it together,
    for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

**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.

**New Testament John 14: 26-27**

**26**But the Advocate,the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. **27**Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

**Prayer** God of mercy, hear our prayer in this Advent season for ourselves, and for our families and friends who live with the struggles of illness and the pain of loss. We ask for strength for today, courage for tomorrow, and peace for the past. We ask these things in the name of Christ, who shares our life in joy and sorrow, death and new birth, despair and promise. Amen.

**Meditation** “Ransom the Captives!”

 God cares for us. Isaiah, spokesperson for the Lord, calls for us to find comfort. He doesn’t suggest it, nor does he ask if you want any. He tells Israel to take comfort in the Lord. He declares that Israel has paid for their sins and they are welcome home. So, now they can have comfort again. Israel had been in exile after foreigners invaded their country: homes, Temple and all that was sacred had been destroyed generations earlier. They were feeling lost, far away from home. So, God hears their cries, and speaking tenderly to them, like a parent to a child, God tells them to take comfort now, saying, “Tell Jerusalem she has paid she has served her term …”

This is good news. God has come to ransom the captives. God has come to free you from that which holds you down. God has sent us a hero, one who does not grow weary or faint. God in the Flesh, dwelling among us. “Comfort, comfort my people...”

There are many moments in our lives when we yearn for comfort and consolation. The ancient ones who sought the long-awaited Messiah saw comfort, before the Messiah even showed up. They had hope for something better, but were still waiting in the darkness. We might also feel like those ancient people, waiting for a better day, a new love, a return to normalcy, but we are not there yet. Like those exiled to a foreign country, Christmas might feel to some of us like a distant and future joy, but not here yet.

Maybe every Christmas you celebrate has a hue of blue to it. It is not like the Christmases of our youth, when every morning you awake, looking forward to opening that Advent calendar to discover a little message from heaven, in the form of a Christmassy chocolate or picture. There is also the mystery of Old St. Nick, able to fit into the chimney and sneak around the house leaving us presents. (kind of creepy, when you think about it!) Remember our tradition of leaving out cookies and milk, since Santa was surely hungry during his annual night flight around the world. My nephews also left out carrots, were concerned that the reindeer also needed something. The Christmases of our youth tend to be full of ancient and holy mystery, perhaps because children don’t live so much in the past as they do in the present, and future, looking forward that Great Day.

As we get older, the mystery of Christmas can fade. We might find we have too much hanging onto us, have had more pain in life. Christmas can be a time of worry – about our jobs, losing someone very dear to us, losing our health or certain abilities. The anticipation of Christmas may even seem like too much work, or we are just too busy to think about it. Sometimes we might just dismiss the whole thing entirely, for memories of Christmas past are much happier than this one. You might feel like this is a Christmas in exile, exiled to our homes because of COVID, unable to travel and be with loved ones this year.

No matter what happens to us, God is there to comfort and support us. Isaiah urges us to seek comfort! “Comfort, Comfort, my people, says God.” Christmas was meant to bring healing with the birth of a Savior. Jesus Christ was born for you and me. Just as in Isaiah, when God saw their pain, God already sees yours and knows that you might feel crummy during the holidays. If anyone understands, it is Jesus, whose name is “God with us” “Emmanuel.”

All you have to do is take a read the carols of the season. Read carefully the words to the hymn we are about to sing, “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.” It is not like “Joy to the World.” It has a haunting melody, bittersweet. It recognizes the pain and suffering of this world. It calls for God to cast it all out, praying for Emmanuel’s arrival. And then it bursts into “Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel. And ransom captive Israel.” The carol says to us that God loves us enough to join us in human form… who has decided to pay the price of our sorrow with His own life. He was born into the very same messy kind of life as ours. As a baby with Mary and Joseph, this God was a refugee in Egypt, escaping King Herod. This one befriended the untouchables of this world, and who touched the hurt, lepers, the blind. He knew what it was like to grieve for dear friends, like Lazarus. He prayed for his Father to help him in the garden, as he awaited his arrest. This God took Flesh and Dwelt Among Us, not to force blind joy down our throats. Jesus was born to be with you, to sit with you through the pain, and will hold you. God with us.

God hears your cry. God promises to wipe the slate clean, and carry you through seasons of pain. So, we should be unafraid to admit the pain of our lives which keep us from that Christmas joy. You are invited, using the insert in your worship bulletin, to write those things down and stick them on your fridge as a reminder of what God can help us with. Or, if you would like to have them mentioned in our prayers of the people, an usher is going to come around to collect them in our offering plates. Sometimes just admitting what hurts is truly the reason for Christmas. A chance for hope to be reborn. To say that God came to put death’s dark shadows to flight and refresh our hearts. May the Lord be with you. Amen.

**Collection of Prayers**

Using the insert in your worship bulletin, please write down your losses, griefs, worries and prayers. If you want them named in today’s prayer, please place them in the offering plate when it comes around.

**Prayer of Intercession and Supplication**

**When I say, “We Pray to the Lord…” You respond, “Lord, Hear our Prayer”**

If we were to list the miracles of Christmas

we’d probably talk about virgin births

angels, perhaps

and stars that light the sky

but perhaps there’s another miracle:

one of Mary saying ‘yes’ when God asked her to believe

and Joseph saying ‘yes’ when God asked him to trust.

They had to change everything about their lives

and the birth of the Christ-child wasn’t possible until they did.

What does it mean for you to say ‘yes’ to this story?

to believe that it might be possible

for the darkness to be transformed to light

and for peace to come in the world?

Those who know the darkest of the world

know the fragility of light;

we hold our breath as the candles flicker

we know they don’t always last.

the birth of Jesus doesn’t make everything right

but it shows us that the only way the darkness can be beaten

is to say ‘yes’ to the birth of light.

In the silence, we pray for those we love and miss today

and we pray for a broken world…

*[Read prayer cards and Kenna ring the bell once after each one.]*

God,

this is the season for miracles

and we pray for one today.

Where there is sorrow,

**we pray for your grace to light the darkness.**

Where is despair,

**we pray for your hope to light the darkness.**

Where there is hatred,

**we pray for your forgiveness to light the darkness.**

Where there is war,

**we pray for your love to light the darkness.**

Where there is confusion,

**we pray for your peace to light the darkness.**

Where there is injustice,

**we pray for your courage to light the darkness.**

Where there is fear

**we pray for your joy to light the darkness.**

It is the season for miracles

and we pray for one today:

Come, Lord Jesus, may your light come into our world.

In the name of the one who creates us, redeems us, sustains us through all our days, and who also prays for us when we haven’t the words, Amen. Please pray the Lord’s Prayer with me.

Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy 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 debts as we forgive our debtors. Deliver us from evil and … for thine is the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

**Hymn** “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” RH #147

**Benediction** May the power and the mystery go before us, to show us the way, shine above us to lighten our world, lie beneath us to bear us up, walk with us and give us companionship, and glow and flow within us to bring us joy.