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*Blue Christmas Worship: Longing for Light*

As we get started, I do want to let you know that we are recording our service tonight. It’s not being livestreamed but will be shared on our Facebook and YouTube later on for those who weren’t able to make it to the service tonight.

**Prelude** *I Wonder as I Wander*

**Welcome and Gathering**

Friends, welcome to our Blue Christmas Service. Many churches often have these services on the winter solstice, December 21, the longest night of the year, but ours is a little earlier on this second Monday of the month because this is the regular time our Grief Group meets. Our Grief ministry is meaningful one here at Zion where folks gather to be together in community and to share their sorrows and their joys. You’re always welcome to join us for those meetings. We meet at 6 pm across the street in our Education Building.

Though tonight is not the longest night of the year, nonetheless, all throughout December we grow mindful that we are moving deeper into the darkness of the winter season. Days are shorter, nights are longer, and that darkness settles in for a longer stay. Rituals have been observed to mark this movement into darkness since ancient times. The long night has become symbolic of those times when we feel as if illumination is scarce. We might be feeling low because of a loss–of loved ones, the loss of relationships or jobs or the loss of a sense of security and safety. All of us experience loss. It is in the Holy Darkness that we can see light. Ancient people held vigil on the longest night so that they could witness the dawning of a new day–knowing that each day’s sunlight would remain with them longer and longer in the coming months. This has always been a sign of hope for humanity, no matter the religion or creed.

And so we spend a moment tonight in the darkness to acknowledge loss and also remember that there is hope. Just simply gathering together is the start of hope for a new day.

The holiday season can be hard for some of us as we struggle to be “merry” when we don’t actually feel merry and bright. We are not alone. Sorrow is a part of being human, and the Christmas story actually has its fair share of hardship. We can feel warm and fuzzy about a baby being born, but we also must remember that this baby was born into a world, a region, and a time when his Jewish parents were under occupation and treated as lower on the social ladder than the ruling class. We can bask in the giving of gifts spurred by the story of the wise ones giving the baby Jesus gifts, but we also remember that those wise ones had been in conversation with a terrible tyrant ruler, Herod, who would later order all the young ones killed because of his fear that Jesus, the “King of the Jews,” would grow to lead a revolution against him. Fear and suffering and heartbreak are part of the story.

So no matter what you carry in this moment–fear, sorrow, loss, suffering, heartbreak–it is part of the human story *and* the divine story. We are never alone. The Holy Comforter is with us. Let this be our prayer:

**Prayer**—Holy and Comforting One, we come before you feeling vulnerable and spent. Our souls weep, and we wonder how we will get through a time

when bells ring and gifts are exchanged and the word “merry” surrounds us. We long for the “time before”–before this sorrow came to dwell. Help us to trust in your love. In this season of anticipation, help us to expect that as certain as the waves of grief are the moments when you will offer us a little peace, and that it is right and good to feel all of it. Be with us. Come to us. Live in us, Emmanuel, God with Us. Amen.

**Hymn** *O Come, O Come Emmanuel, 154*

**A LITANY FOR LOSSES**

***Light for Here in this Place***

Psalm 36:9 says, “Within You is the spring of life; in your light, we see light.”

Our Advent theme this year is very much about the places in the Christmas story, and so our stable is a centerpiece, this humble place where Christ was born, where the Light of the World was born.

I’m going to light our stable, as a reminder that God is here in this place just as God was in that stable so long ago. And though its light is as blue as many of us feel, the light is still there. When we feel as if our light is dimmed, we can rely on the Holy Light to continue to shine until we ourselves shine bright once more. We are not alone.

The main part of our service tonight is an extended litany for the losses we face. We’ll consider the loss of life, the loss of livelihood, the loss of love, and the loss of liveliness. You’ll be invited to name those losses aloud or hold them quietly in your heart, and we’ll join our voices together and welcome more light into the darkness of this night. We begin with a scripture of comfort, a reminder of God’s steadfast presence whatever loss we face.

***We Hear a Word of Comfort***

*Isaiah 40:1-9*

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 flesh shall see it together,
    for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

**6**A voice says, “Cry out!”
    And I said, “What shall I cry?”
All flesh is grass;
    their constancy is like the flower of the field.
**7**The grass withers; the flower fades,
    when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;
    surely the people are grass.
**8**The grass withers; the flower fades,
    but the word of our God will stand forever.
**9**Get you up to a high mountain,
    O Zion, herald of good news;
lift up your voice with strength,
    O Jerusalem, herald of good news;
    lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah,
    “Here is your God!”

***Loss of Life***

We mourn this night the loss of life. *[light the first candle]*

Some of us have lost loved ones or friends. And we know that there has been loss of life all over this globe.

Are there losses of life you would name this night?

I invite you to repeat after me:

We mourn the loss of life.

**We mourn the loss of life.**

We honor and remember these beloveds.

**We honor and remember these beloveds.**

We pray for comfort and peace.

**We pray for comfort and peace.**

Amen. **Amen.**

***Loss of Livelihood***

We mourn this night the loss of livelihoods. *[light the second candle]*

Some of us have perhaps lost jobs, or dreams or maybe the passions for the work we do have died this year. Perhaps you’ve retired or faced another big life transition. Many more whose names we do not know are not sure how they will sustain their families, themselves.

Are there losses of livelihood you would name this night?

I invite you to repeat after me:

We mourn the loss of livelihood.

**We mourn the loss of livelihood.**

We honor and remember the dreams now deferred.

**We honor and remember the dreams now deferred.**

We pray for sustenance and resilience.

**We pray for sustenance and resilience.**

Amen. **Amen.**

***Loss of Love***

We mourn this night the loss of love. *[light the third candle]*

Some of us are encountering a loss of relationship in this moment. We mourn the loss of imagined futures together. We also mourn that it has become more and more difficult to love others who are different from us.

Are there losses of love you would name this night?

I invite you to repeat after me:

We mourn a loss of love.

**We mourn a loss of love.**

We honor and remember the good moments and seek healing for the pain.

**We honor and remember the good moments and seek healing for the pain.**

We pray for compassion and change in our divided communities.

**We pray for compassion and change in our divided communities.**

Amen. **Amen.**

**Loss of Liveliness**

We mourn this night the loss of liveliness. *[light the fourth candle]*

For so many, the last few years have sapped us of our energy, our enthusiasm, and our sense of well-being. Some may face changes because of disease or illness, bodies that don’t allow us to do all we would like. We mourn the loss of all who are suffering with anxiety and depression, who are finding it difficult to live each day with fullness or to find hope for tomorrow.

Are there losses of liveliness you would name this night?

I invite you to repeat after me:

We mourn this loss of liveliness.

**We mourn this loss of liveliness.**

We honor and remember that each person is precious and whole.

**We honor and remember that each person is precious and whole.**

We pray for recovery and renewed vigor.

**We pray for recovery and renewed vigor.**

Amen. **Amen.**

**Hymn** *In the Bleak Midwinter,* 196

***More Light***

And now we light a fifth candle, a Christ candle. Just as we will do on Christmas Eve, we light this as a sign of our belief that the light does always come and is coming even now. *[light the fifth candle in the center]*

This light casts its glow on all the surrounding prayers we have prayed. This light resides within us, perhaps dim for a time, but always lit–an ember of the Holy inside us. This light reminds us that we are not alone.

**Ritual of Hope**

In our longing for more light, it helps to find ways to let the light of Christ shine more brightly through us. In doing so, we help grow hope not only in ourselves but in those around us as well. Tonight, you’re invited to light a candle and speak into the darkness of this night that which gives you hope. Maybe, you’re not feeling so hopeful right now but you want to take one small step toward experiencing more light. You can still light a candle. If you’d like to remain seated, just raise your hand, and I can light a candle for you.

But, before we do all of this, I want to share a word of light and hope with you.

*A Creed for Advent by Cally Booker*We believe in God, robed in splendour,

veiled in mystery,

ruler alike of darkness and light.

We encounter God in Jesus Christ,

who was tested and put to death,

but whose radiance could not be quenched;

whose touch brings a blaze of colour

to a dull, drab world:

reviving the weary, healing the wounded,

unsettling the satisfied.

We walk with God,

guided by the light of God’s loving spirit;

the light which enters the shadowed places

of our hearts and leads us into truth and life.

We wait for God,

and for the fulfillment of God’s promises;

for the time when the darkness will hold no fear

and the light will show the way,

and creation will be made whole once more

and God’s peace will reign forever.

Amen.

Friends, come forward now to share your light and speak your hope.

**A Gift—**I’d like to share with you a small gift tonight. These are blue stars that you can use as a bookmark or to stick somewhere this season. When you find yourself feeling blue, take out this star. Remember this night and this community and that you are not alone in your longing. There back is blank, so if there is a prayer or a scripture or quote to you want to write out to help guide you this season, you’re welcome to do that on the back.

**Hymn** *O Little Town of Bethlehem,* 180

**Closing**

Thank you for pausing this evening to remember, to acknowledge, to mourn.

All of it is holy. All of it is part of this season when we pray for hope, peace, joy, and love.

May you know that you are not alone. As you go into the night, go knowing

that the growing light of tomorrow will be with you throughout this season and into the new year of continuing transition.

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace, both now and forever more. Amen.

**Postlude** *Brightest and Best*

Service adapted from www.worshipdesignstudio.com/ontheway unless otherwise indicated.