

Blue Christmas

Worship Service

at Clarendon United Methodist Church

December 13, 2023

7:00PM



CUMC | 606 N. Irving Street | Arlington, VA 22201 | www.ClarendonUMC.org

Welcome to the Blue Christmas Worship Service.

This service will give us the chance to express the past, present and future grief, fears, anger and confusion that are a normal part of living and loving.

Please take a moment to contemplate your sorrow, your loss, your concern, your prayer, or your hope. You will have time in the service to write those on the stars and hang them on the Christmas tree as a symbol of turning them over to God. You will also have the opportunity to light a candle for someone you have lost and especially miss this Christmas.

* You are invited to stand in body or spirit as indicated and to join the service by saying the parts written in **bold**.

However, it is most important that you do what you need to do to facilitate your worship. **So please sit, remain silent, weep, or even pace,** as you feel the need throughout this worship service. There are people here who will sustain you with their singing, praying and love.

The service was lovingly prepared by the Lay Servants of Clarendon United Methodist Church: Laura Bishop, Linda Holz, Noreen Quill and Fran Underwood.
We thank Lisa Gibbs-Smith, Director of Worship Arts for her participation.

The 'Blue Christmas' service used tonight is based on an order developed and used at The Cathedral Church of Saint Andrew, Honolulu Hawaii.

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/blue-christmas-a-service-of-reflection-for-the-longest-night>

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<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/notes-and-commentary-on-the-cathedral-church-of-saint-andrew-cosa-blue-christmas>

Blue Christmas

Order of Worship

December 13, 2023 7:00 PM

Prelude Music

Lisa Gibbs-Smith

Call to Worship

Fran Underwood

Leader: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
All things were made by God, and without God nothing came to be.
What came to be through God was life,
and this life was the light of the world.

People: The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Welcome

Noreen Quill

*Hymn

O Little Town of Bethlehem

UMH 230

The First Reading: Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

Laura Bishop

Psalms 22

Leader: 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?

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

Leader: In you, our ancestors trusted. They trusted and you delivered them.

**People: 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.**

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

**People: 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 23 (in unison)

The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;
he leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul;
he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his Name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
for thou art with me;
thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies;
thou anointest my head with oil;
my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Music Interlude

Jesus, Jesus, Rest Your Head

arr. Cathy Moglebust

Fran Underwood, handbells; Lisa Gibbs-Smith, piano

During this interlude you are invited to contemplate how difficult it is to grieve or feel angry at God and also find the hope and peace that is promised to us.
How difficult it is to feel comfort when we walk in difficult times!

The Second Reading: Isaiah 40 (selected verses)

Noreen Quill

Memory Stars Homily

Linda Holz

Music Interlude

Lisa Gibbs-Smith

You are invited to write on each star your concerns or your concerns for others.

Litany of Remembrance

Leader: We light this first candle
to remember those whom we have loved and lost.
We pause to remember clearly, their faces, their voices, their bodies.
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

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel


UMH 211

 **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.**

Leader: 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.
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

 **O come thou Wisdom from on high, who orderest all things mightily
To us the path of knowledge show, and teach us in her ways to go
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

Leader: 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.
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.

**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 though the night be dark,
the dawn will come,
 and dawn defeats the darkness.**


A period of silent reflection

 **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.**

Leader: We light this fourth candle to remember faith,
the gift of light and hope that God offers to us
in the story of Christmas,
which also began in abandonment, insecurity,
and humbleness in a poor stable.
We remember that the loving God
who came to share this life with us promises us comfort and peace.

**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

 **O come desire of nations, bind all peoples in one heart and mind.
From dust thou brought us forth to life; deliver us from earthly strife.
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

Musical Interlude

Lisa Gibbs-Smith

During this interlude, you are invited to come forward to hang your stars on the Christmas tree as a symbol of giving your concerns over to God.

***The Prayers of the People**

Fran Underwood

Leader: 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, hear our prayer,

All: And in Your merciful love, answer.

Leader: God of mercy and compassion,
there are those among us who are grieving over what might have been.
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 storm.
Lord, hear our prayer.

All: And in Your merciful love, answer.

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 Thy peace.
Lord, hear our prayer.

All: And in Your merciful love, answer.

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.
Please hold us close in your embrace, be near to us this night,
until the light returns and morning comes.
Lord, hear our prayer,

All: And in Your merciful love, answer.

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

***Third Reading: John 14:25-27**

Linda Holz

Musical Interlude

Aria in F Major

Handel, arr. Stephenson

You are invited to come forward to light a candle
as an expression of yearning for light, peace and hope.

Psalm 121 (in unison)

Noreen Quill

**I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills,
from whence cometh my help.
My help cometh from the Lord,
who hath made heaven and earth.
He will not suffer thy foot to be moved;
he that keepeth thee will not slumber;
behold, the God that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord is thy keeper; the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand.
The sun shall not smite thee by day nor the moon at night.
The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil and shall sustain thy soul.
He shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in,
from this time forth and even forevermore.**

Prayer

Leader: 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.
Help us to remember you and to listen for your voice
in the words of family, friends, and strangers.
Kindle our hearts and awaken hope,
that we may know you as you reveal yourself in the world
and in our lives.
Let the light of your holy Spirit shine like these candles in the darkness,
lighting the way for all who feel despairing, lost, or forgotten,**

and grant that it may come to dwell so deeply in our hearts
that when we leave this place it may shine on,
for us and for those we meet along the way. Amen.

***Hymn**

Silent Night

UMH 239

***Concluding Prayer**

Linda Holz

Leader: Let us pray.

All: Another day will come, O God.

**I know not what it may bring forth, but make me ready, God,
for whatever it may be.**

If I am to stand up, help me to stand bravely.

If I am to sit still, help me to sit quietly.

If I am to lie low, help me to do it patiently.

And if I am to do nothing, help me do it gallantly.

Make these words more than words, and give me the Spirit of thy Peace.

Amen.

***Blessing and Dismissal**

Laura Bishop

Leader: 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.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

People: And also with you.

You are invited to greet one another in the name of the Lord. If you wish to talk or need a hug, the pastor and lay servants are available following the service.