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Blue Christmas: A Service of Comfort & Hope

North Olmsted United Methodist Church

December 15, 2020 7:00 pm

This Blue Christmas service is a gentle, contemplative service for thosewho are carrying pain or loss during thisseason of celebration. 2020 has been quite a year for our church family… a year of many challenges and losses. We are not able to celebrate Christmas with the same traditions, the same gatherings of friends and families, as we have in years past. And we may simply be too tired, too grief-stricken, to find joy in the creation of new traditions.

Christmas is also a time of year that may bring up memories of past pain or sorrow. Holidays often heighten new experiences of suffering occurring now in our hearts, in our neighborhoods, and in our world. In this service, we will have the opportunity to listen to music and to pray. We will be invited to offer up any pain, loneliness, or sad memories, as well as any anxiety or fear, to the One whose birth we eagerly await…Jesus, the Christ.

**GATHERING**

**OPENING SCRIPTURE** John 1:1-5

**LIGHTING OF CENTRAL CANDLE**

We light this center candle… a single light that the deepest darkness cannot conquer – small – insignificant… but a sign of hope. May it speak to us tonight of the tiny flame of hope that God places deep within us – the stubborn little light that refuses to be extinguished by all that life throws at it.

**WELCOME**

**OPENING PRAYER**

God of mercy and love, we gather here today as hurting people, bringing our pain, our sorrow, and our confusion to this safe space tonight. We ask You to meet us in our darkness and give us freedom to struggle together as we seek your presence. We ask for strength for today, courage for tomorrow, and peace for the past. Amen.

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

Leader: Our Savior, Jesus, once said, “Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” And so, we invite each other to this time of peaceful worship. Tonight, we come looking for the Christ Child.

**People: We come, bringing our hurts, our worries, and our fears.**

Leader: We come seeking relief from pain, anxiety, loneliness, and despair. With the psalmist of Scriptures, we say,

**People: “O Lord, you are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.”**

**ALL: We come tonight to rest with God.**

**UNISON PRAYER**

**God of Mercy, hear our prayer in this Advent season, for ourselves and our families. We pray for those whose hearts are broken and whose voices tremble with uncertainty, grief, or sorrow. Comfort, Comfort, Lord, Your Holy People. We ask for strength for today, courage for tomorrow, and peace for the past. We ask these things in the name of our Savior, Jesus, who shares our life in joy and in sorrow. Amen.**

**PSALM 23**

**CANDLE LIGHTING LITANY**

**LIGHTING OF THE FIRST CANDLE**

We light this first candle to remember those whom we have loved and lost. We remember their seat at our tables and in our church services. We pause to remember clearly, their faces, their voices, their bodies. We embrace and give thanks for the memories that connect them to us in this season of expectation, when all Creation waits for the Light. We thank God for our loved ones and ask for God’s comfort. When we are feeling overcome with sadness, we ask for the peace that is greater than we can ever understand. Lord hear our prayer… Amen.

*Verse:* O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,

That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.

*Chorus:* Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

**LIGHTING OF THE SECOND CANDLE**

The empty chair also represents the pain and sadness that can come from other events that enter our lives, uninvited and unwanted – leaving us reeling in pain and shock, unable to shake the feeling that it wasn’t supposed to be like that. So, we light this candle to represent other losses that we may face: the loss of jobs – those unemployed or marginally employed; the loss of health; the loss of loved ones through death; the loss of independence or freedom; the loss of confidence or security - plans that did not work out, or hopes that ended in despair; the loss of a sense of “normalcy” – life up-ended, not by our choice; the loss of relationships and connections – physical distancing from family and friends; the loss of trust; the loss of faith; the loss of joy. We pause now for you to tell the God who longs to bind up those who are broken-hearted about some of the losses that you are feeling at this time. Lord hear our prayer…. Amen.

*Verse:* O come, thou Wisdom from on high, and order all things far and nigh;

To us the path of knowledge show and cause us in her ways to go.

*Chorus:* Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

**LIGHTING OF THE THIRD CANDLE**

We light this third candle to remember ourselves this Christmas time. This candle represents our courage: the courage to face our sadness, to share our feelings with others, our doubts and fears, our anger, frustration, or depression, and to dare to hope in the depths of our pain. We pause now for you to tell the God who longs to take you by the hand and says to you, do not fear, I will help you, about some areas where you need help in finding courage. Lord hear our prayer…

*Verse:* O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer our spirits by thy justice here;

Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death’s dark shadows put to flight.

*Chorus:* Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

**LIGHTING OF THE FOURTH CANDLE**

We light this fourth candle to remember those who have supported us in our pain. We pause to remember the prayers, the words of comfort and support, the acts of kindness from family and friends and those who stood with us in our time of need. We pause to remember our faith, the gift of light and hope that God offers to us in the story of Christmas, a story that began in abandonment, insecurity, and humbleness, centered in a poor stable. We remember that the loving God who came to share this life with us through Jesus, promises *us* comfort and peace. Thank you, God, for sending others to remind us that we are never alone. And thank you for sending your son, Jesus, to a hurting world. Amen.

*Verse:* 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.

*Chorus:* Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel/Henry Sloane Coffin, Laurence Hull Stookey, Thomas Helmore/©1989 The United Methodist Publishing House (Admin. by Music Services, Inc.)/Used by Permission, CCLI #1715848

**FOCUS ON THE CENTRAL CANDLE**

Standing here amidst the candles that represent some of life’s joy and pain, this central candle represents Jesus who has come to be Emmanuel, God with us, in the midst of it all. Jesus who was born as a helpless baby – and who hears our cries and understands how weak and helpless we can feel. Jesus the good shepherd, who knows our hearts and offers us healing and hope in the midst of our suffering. Who came to help us understand just how much God loves us. And who lived and died to restore our relationship with our Heavenly Father. Jesus who will reign as King over God’s new creation, where there will be no more sickness or death or crying or pain for all eternity. And who has given us his Holy Spirit to help, comfort, and guide us as we seek to follow him here on earth and wait for his glorious return.

**SPECIAL MUSIC**  “Welcome to Our World” arr. J. Walsh

Andrew & Josh Walsh

**LITANY OF COMFORT FOR BLUE CHRISTMAS** Written by: [Debra Faulk](https://www.uua.org/offices/people/debra-faulk)

Leader: All around us are bright lights and merry messages yet in our heart not all is joyful. There is grief with the loss of relationships…those we love, no longer with us because of death; those we have loved who are estranged from us; those we love, yet experience a diminishment of intimacy; there is grief with the loss and change of relationship. Grief, bittersweet, for it is a consequence of the presence of love. This season brings forth many feelings…

**Response: We find comfort in naming these feelings; we find some peace in being together.**

Leader: All around us are bright lights and merry messages yet in our heart not all is joyful. There may be pain in our bodies…physical pain as a natural outcome of aging; physical pain that presents itself in illness; pain in the body that forces us to change and imposes limitations. Pain, bittersweet, for physical experience includes both pain and pleasure. This season brings forth many feelings…

**Response: We find comfort in naming these feelings; we find some peace in being together.**

Leader: All around us are bright lights and merry messages yet in our heart not all is joyful. There may be anger and regret with the memories we hold…anger with past experiences of hurt or abuse; regret of our own actions that may have caused hurt to others; anger that life has not turned out as we imagined; regret for what we might have said or done. Anger and regret, bittersweet, is presenting the possibility for healing and forgiveness. This season brings forth many feelings…

**Response: We find comfort in naming these feelings; we find some peace in being together.**

Leader: All around us are bright lights and merry messages yet in our heart not all is joyful. There may be uncertainty that accompanies transition and change…uncertainty of what the future may bring with changes; uncertainty of direction or purpose after retirement or change of vocation; uncertainty when changing residence, by choice or necessity. Uncertainty, bittersweet, lets us know we are alive, and may also change. This season brings forth many feelings…

**Response: We find comfort in naming these feelings; we find some peace in being together.**

Leader: All around us are bright lights and merry messages yet in our heart not all is joyful. There may be a sense of hopelessness…hopelessness in the face of so much violence and suffering; hopelessness with attempts to heal our aching world and ourselves; hopelessness in witnessing what we have not managed to accomplish. Hopelessness, bittersweet for its longing, reminds us of our capacity for hope and the human spirit’s tenacity and courage that rest deep within each of us. This season brings forth many feelings…

**Response: We find comfort in naming these feelings; we find some peace in being together.**

Leader: All around us are bright lights and merry messages yet in our heart not all is joyful. There is loneliness…loneliness when we find ourselves alone after being long-partnered; loneliness when we are separated from loved ones; loneliness when we move to a new community and struggle to find our way; loneliness that never seems filled even with good company; loneliness that is an ever-present aching in the heart. Loneliness is bittersweet, for it is felt only when we have known connectedness. This season brings forth many feelings…

**Response: We find comfort in naming these feelings; we find some peace in being together.**

Leader: All around us are bright lights and merry messages yet in our heart not all is joyful. We know grief and pain. We know anger and regret. We know hopelessness and loneliness.  
We know all these feelings, we name them, we live them, for such is the human experience. Love presents us with the possibility of being hurt, with the grief of loss. Connection holds the potential of loneliness and uncertainty. Forgiveness can begin to heal anger and regret. Being alive is a courageous act in which we engage all of our emotions. This season brings forth many feelings…

**Response: We find comfort in naming these feelings; we find some peace in being together. Amen.**

**SILENT NIGHT**

As our service comes to an end, I invite you to light a candle in your own homes and listen to the serenity of this Silent Night. It is my prayer that throughout this service your broken heart has felt the blanketing of God’s peace.

**CLOSING PRAYER**

Comforting God, as this service comes to an end, we ask that you continue to wrap us in your presence. Be with us in our struggles, and when we get lost in the darkness, shine your light and help us find our way back to you. Amen.

**THE BLESSING**

Leader: The God of strength moves within us;

**People: The God of courage hears our distress.**

Leader: The God of hope reveals wholeness to us;

**People: The God of healing touches us when we are broken.**

Leader: When our pain overwhelms us, when our burden is too heavy,

**People: we turn to our God, who sustains us and redeems us.**

Leader: When there is loneliness, when there is isolation,

**People: we turn to our God, who is loving and present.**

Leader: Beloved Children of God, as we go from this place, may the God who created us, redeemed us, and sustains us, be present with us and remind us always that we are not alone.

**People: O come, O come, Emmanuel. God is truly with us. Amen.**

*\*Tonight’s service was a compilation of prayers and readings from various sources arranged by Rev. Alice Walsh.  She is deeply grateful for the liturgy of An Australian Blue Christmas Service, written by Melanie Carroll, Associate Pastor at Frenchs Forest Baptist Church, Sydney, Australia (Used with Permission).*

Following worship, at about 7:40 pm, you are welcome to join us on Zoom for a time of fellowship.

Rev. Alice Walsh is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.  
Join Zoom Meeting [https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83899434125?pwd=VXFESFJmOFlORCtUOHRxV0VIQ0lQdz09](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83899434125?pwd%3DVXFESFJmOFlORCtUOHRxV0VIQ0lQdz09&sa=D&source=calendar&ust=1607799331654000&usg=AOvVaw0EnF6j_dINVkOQ5h_FMzPe)  
Meeting ID: 838 9943 4125 Passcode: 086284

Thank you for attending tonight’s Blue Christmas Service. We hope you found this service encouraging. We continue to pray that you will find peace and comfort in knowing that you are not alone as you journey. Always remember that God knows your pain and loves you unconditionally.

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If you would like to speak confidentially with either Pastor Hoyte or

Rev. Alice (or if you would like to have your own Stephen Minister for personal support and Christian caregiving), please call the church office at: 440-779-6634, ext. 16.

God bless you,

*The Stephen Ministers of North Olmsted United Methodist Church*

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*Worship online with us! Visit* [*www.noumc.org*](http://www.noumc.org) *for a link which will allow you to experience Christmas Eve worship anytime that day or evening with lessons and carols, special music,*

*slideshows of pictures and videos involving members of our church family,*

*candlelight, and the singing of Silent Night.*

**North Olmsted United Methodist Church**

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