

MUSICIANS

Many thanks to the musicians who shared their gifts and talents for this Blue Christmas service:

Irmengard Jennings, Piano
Victoria Batta, Flute
Becky Long, Cello

READERS

Ann Skoog
Jeff Parke

ASSISTING

Beth Allevato
Social Worker and Grief Councilor
Linda Apmadoc,
Coordinator of Trinity in Community
Mike Ballinger, Chaplain
Plymouth Village
Wade Forde, Chaplain,
Redlands Community Hospital

OFFICIANT

The Rev. Paul A. Price

*A Service of
Blue Christmas*



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*Wednesday, December 22, 2020
5:00 PM*

Christmas is a time of year when everyone expects people to be cheery and upbeat. However, not everyone feels this way about Christmas. For many, this time of year can be very difficult for a variety of reasons. Some are dealing with the death of a loved one. Others are trying to rebuild their lives in the midst of or following divorce or separation. Others are coping with the loss of a job. Others are living with illness or some other 'dis-ease' that may make the future uncertain. These and any number of other human situations make parties and joviality painful for many people in our community.

The Service of Blue Christmas is an attempt to recognize the needs of people who are blue at Christmas by creating sacred space for people living through dark times. The intention of the service is to be reflective, accepting where we really are, and offering the hope of healing.

However, even in the midst of this, it is important to remember that this is the season of Emmanuel, "God with us." The fact is that what happened at Christmas, when God sent His son for us, is the ultimate expression of God's love for every one of us. Therefore, we are not alone. We are all worthy of love and are loved unconditionally. That is the message we hope to convey with this Service of Blue Christmas.

FOR HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

Give your blessing, gracious God, to those whom you have called to the study and practice of the arts of healing, and the prevention of disease and pain. Give them the wisdom of your Holy Spirit, that through their work the health of our community may be advanced and your creation glorified; through your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

FOR EMERGENCY WORKERS

God our strong deliverer: when those charged with the urgent mediation of your healing power feel overwhelmed by the numbers of the suffering, uphold them in their fatigue and banish their despair. Let them see with your eyes, so they may know all their patients as precious. Give comfort, and renew their energy and compassion, for the sake of Jesus in whom is our life and our hope. Amen.

Or this

Divine Physician, hear our prayers for those in emergency medicine. By your healing power, grant them quick minds and skillful hands. Strengthen them in times of trauma. In quiet times, give them rest and assurance of the value of their work. Keep them ever prepared for the work you have called them to do, for your mercy's sake. Amen.

*PRAYERS FOR CAREGIVERS AND OTHERS
IN SUPPORT OF THE SICK*

Lover of souls, we bless your Holy Name for all who are called to mediate your grace to those who are sick or infirm. Sustain them by your Holy Spirit, that they may bring your loving-kindness to those in pain, fear, and confusion; that in bearing one another's burdens they may follow the example of our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

or this

Compassionate God, support and strengthen all those who reach out in love, concern, and prayer for the sick and distressed. In their acts of compassion, may they know that they are your instruments. In their concerns and fears may they know your peace. In their prayer may they know your steadfast love. May they not grow weary or faint-hearted, for your mercy's sake. Amen.

AT THE LIMITS OF OUR POWER TO HELP

O Lord, we are at the limits of our power to help. For what we have left undone, forgive us. For what you have helped us to do, we thank you. For what must be done by others, lend your strength. Now shelter us in your peace which passes our understanding. Amen.

*FOR THOSE WHO ARE SICK AND
THOSE WHO MINISTER TO THEM*

Gracious God, source of life and health: Jesus came to our disordered world to make your people whole. Send your Spirit on those who are sick and all who minister to them; that when the sick enter your peace, they may offer thanks to your Great Name; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

PRELUDE

WELCOME

There is a season for all things under heaven. For many of us gathered here, this is the season of our weeping, and we will let our tears fall to the ground in the presence of God who weeps with us. We will, with courage, plant seeds, trusting that there will again be a time for hope.

CALL TO WORSHIP

led by Fr. Paul Price

- Leader:* God, there is so much worry and anxiety around the world. Things seem so unsettled and unstable, and yet this ancient story of faith reminds us to keep hope for the future. Help us to see the possibilities that always come with birth.
- People:* **Teach us to sing with notes formed of hope. May all the earth join the chorus and dance to your beating heart.**
- Leader:* God, today there are many who grieve for the loss of loved ones. Today there are many who look for meaning in the face of life's disappointments. Today there are many who wonder where their next meal will come from. Today there are many who look for work and income. Help us to see the possibilities that always come with birth.
- People:* **Teach us to sing with notes formed of hope. May all the earth join the chorus and dance to your beating heart.**
- Leader:* God, through wise ones of old you show us a vision of what could be. Through mystics and prophets of today you challenge our vision of the present. Remind us of that vision of peace. Empower us to

live as if we believed it was really possible. Help us to live the possibilities that always come with birth.

People: **Teach us to sing with notes formed of hope. May all the earth join the chorus and dance to your beating heart.**

Leader: God, help us believe all will be well, all will be well, all manner of things will be well. And as part of us finds it unbelievable that such a promise could be true, when our despair grows and the shadow threatens to overcome the light, remind us that we are people of hope. When we are tempted to find relief from the present in trying to recreate the past, call us to be people of the future. Help us to live the possibilities that always come with birth.

People: **Teach us to sing with notes formed of hope. May all the earth join the chorus and dance to your beating heart. Amen.**

COME THOU LONG EXPECTED JESUS

1 Come, thou long - ex - pect-ed Je - sus, born to set thy peo - ple free;
2 Is - rael's strength and con-so - la - tion, hope of all the earth thou art;
3 Born thy peo - ple to de - liv - er, born a child, and yet a king,
4 By thine own e - ter - nal Spi - rit rule in all our hearts a - lone;

from our fears and sins re - lease us, let us find our rest in thee.
dear de - sire of ev - ery na - tion, joy of ev - ery long - ing heart.
born to reign in us for ev - er, now thy gra - cious king - dom bring.
by thine all - suf - fi - cient mer - it raise us to thy glo - rious throne.

IN THE EVENING

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

FOR STRENGTH AND CONFIDENCE

Gracious God, only source of life and health: Help, comfort, and relieve me, and give your power of healing to those who minister to my needs; that my weakness may be turned to strength and confidence in your loving care; for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.

FOR THE SLEEPLESS

Holy and Blessed One: shine on me as I lie sleepless. Illumine my spirit and give me rest in you, so that I may recognize you as the true God who brings us out of darkness into our eternal light. Amen.

FOR REST

O God my refuge and strength: in this place of unrelenting light and noise, enfold me in your holy darkness and silence, that I may rest secure under the shadow of your wings. Amen.

FOR ONE WHO FEARS LOSING HOPE

Loving God, by your Holy Spirit inspire me, as I fear losing hope. Give me a fresh vision of your love, that I may find again what I fear I have lost. Grant me your powerful deliverance; through the One who makes all things new, Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.

These prayers are from the Supplemental Resources for the Book of Common Prayer: Enriching Our Worship.

PRAYERS FOR PERSONAL USE

FOR TRUST IN GOD

O God, the source of all health: So fill my heart with faith in your love, that with calm expectancy I may make room for your power to possess me, and gracefully accept your healing; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

IN PAIN

Lord Jesus Christ, by your patience in suffering you hallowed earthly pain and gave us the example of obedience to your Father's will: Be near me in my time of weakness and pain; sustain me by your grace, that my strength and courage may not fail; heal me according to you will; and help me always to believe that what happens to me here is of little account if you hold me in eternal life, my Lord and my God. Amen.

FOR SLEEP

O heavenly Father, you give your children sleep for the refreshing of soul and body: Grant me this gift, I pray; keep me in that perfect peace which you have promised to those whose minds are fixed on you; and give me such a sense of your presence, that in the hours of silence I may enjoy the blessed assurance of your love; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

IN THE MORNING

This is another day, O Lord. I know not what it will bring forth, but make me ready, Lord, 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, let me do it gallantly. Make these words more than words, and give me the Spirit of Jesus. Amen.

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH

led by Linda Apmadoc

Leader: We light this first candle to remember those whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember their names, their faces, their voices, the memories that bind them to us in this season.

(Pause while the first candle is lit)

People: **May God's eternal love surround them.**

Hymn: **Silent night, holy night,
all is calm, all is bright
'round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy infant, so tender and mild.
Sleep in heavenly peace.
Sleep in heavenly peace.**

Leader: We light this second candle to remember the pain of loss: the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, the loss of health. We pause to gather up the pain of the past and offer it to God, asking that from God's hands we receive the gift of peace.

(Pause while the second candle is lit)

People: **Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into your future.**

Hymn: **Silent night, holy night,
Grief abounds, ever in sight,
Christ now comes in manger bare,
Holds our loved ones in holy care.
Joy, at last, to be ours.
Joy, at last, to be ours**

Leader: We light this third candle to remember ourselves this Christmastime. We pause and remember these past weeks and months: the disbelief, the anger, the down times, the joy and sorrow of memories, the hugs and handshakes of family and friends who care for us. We give thanks for all the support we have known.

(Pause while the third candle is lit)

People: **Help us to know Eternal Love, we pray.**

Hymn: **Silent night, holy night,
shepherds quake at the sight
glories stream from heaven afar,
heavenly hosts sing alleluia
Christ, the Savior is born!
Christ, the Savior is born!**

Leader: We light this fourth candle to remember our faith and the gift of hope that the Christmas story offers to us. We remember that God, who shares our life, promises us a place and time of no more pain and suffering.

(Pause while the fourth candle is lit)

People: **Let us remember the One who shows us the way, who brings the truth, and who bears the light.**

Hymn: **Silent night, holy night,
Son of God, love's pure light
radiant beams from thy holy face,
with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.**

BLESSING AND DISMISSAL

given by Fr. Paul Price

You will know
the moment of its
arriving
by your release
of the breath
you have held
so long;
a loosening
of the clenching
in your hands,
of the clutch
around your heart;
a thinning
of the darkness
that had drawn itself
around you.

This blessing
does not mean
to take the night away
but it knows
its hidden roads,
knows the resting spots
along the path,

knows what it means
to travel
in the company
of a friend.

So when
this blessing comes,
take its hand.
Get up.
Set out on the road
you cannot see.

This is the night
when you can trust
that any direction
you go,
you will be walking
toward the dawn.

POSTLUDE

PEACE BEFORE US

1. Peace be - fore us,
 2. Love be - fore us,
 3. Light be - fore us,
 4. Christ be - fore us,
 5. Peace be - fore us,

peace be - hind us, peace
 love be - hind us, love
 light be - hind us, light
 Christ be - hind us, Christ
 peace be - hind us, peace

un - der our feet.
 un - der our feet.

Peace with - in us, peace o - ver us,
 Love with - in us, love o - ver us,
 Light with - in us, light o - ver us,
 Christ with - in us, Christ o - ver us,
 Peace with - in us, peace o - ver us,

1-4. 5.
 let all a - round us be peace.
 let all a - round us be love.
 let all a - round us be light.
 let all a - round us be Christ.
 let all a - round us be peace.

Let all a - round us be peace.

Let all a - round us be peace.

A LITANY OF COMPLAINT

led by Pastor Wade Forde

Leader Hear the cries of your people, O God.

People **We will lament and not hold back.
 We will refuse to be comforted until we have
 made known to you our sorrow.
 We are bereft.**

Leader Our souls cleave to the dust.

People **Our eyes are wasted with grief.
 We are drenched with tears.
 Our hearts melt like wax.**

Leader Our souls melt away for sorrow.

People **We are poured out like water.
 Our bodies are racked.**

Leader Our eyes have failed for watching for your promise.

People **When will you comfort us?**

Leader We open our mouths and pant in pain.

People **Why do you stand so far off, O Lord,
 and hide yourself in time of trouble?**

Leader Our eyes shed streams of tears.

People **Our indignation consumes us.**

Leader We cry out to you.

People **We grow weary with our groaning.**

Leader Early in the morning we call to you.

People **Let our cry come before you, O Lord.
 Deliver us according to your promise of
 mercy.**

A brief silence is kept.

Leader O Lord, we wait for you.

People More than sentries wait for the morning,
our souls wait for you alone.

The Leader prays,

Gracious God, the comfort of all who sorrow, the strength of all who suffer: Let the cry of those in misery and need come to you, that we may find your mercy present with us in all our afflictions; give us strength for the sake of him who suffered for us, your son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

STORIES OF HOPE

FIRST STORY

God can handle our complaints Job 3:1-7, 11-14
(The Good News Bible)

Finally, Job broke the silence and cursed the day on which he had been born.

O God, put a curse on the day I was born;
put a curse on the night when I was conceived!

Turn that day into darkness, God.

Never again remember that day;
never again let light shine on it.

Make it a day of gloom and thick darkness;
cover it with clouds, and blot out the sun.

Blot that night out of the year,
and never let it be counted again;
make it a barren, joyless night.

I wish I had died in my mother's womb
or died the moment I was born.

WE REMEMBER THEM

led by Chaplain Mike Ballinger

Leader: In the rising of the sun and its going down,

People: We remember them.

Leader: In the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter,

People: We remember them.

Leader: In the opening of the buds and in the rebirth of spring,

People: We remember them.

Leader: In the blueness of the sky and in the warmth of summer,

People: We remember them.

Leader: In the rustling of leaves and in the beauty of autumn,

People: We remember them.

Leader: In the beginning of the year and when it ends,

People: We remember them.

Leader: When we are weary and in need of strength,

People: We remember them.

Leader: When we are lost and are sick of heart,

People: We remember them.

Leader: When we have joys we yearn to share,

People: We remember them.

Leader: So long as we live, they too shall live,
For they are now a part of us,

People: As we remember them.

In this season of short days and long nights, of grey and white
 and cold, teach us the lessons of beginnings;
 that such waitings and endings may be the starting place,
 a planting of seeds which bring to birth what is ready to be
 born—something right and just and different,
 a new song,
 a deeper relationship,
 a fuller love—in the fullness of your time.
 O God, grant us the sense of your timing.

O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer.
 When I call an - swer me. O Lord, hear my prayer, O
 Lord, hear my prayer. Come and lis - ten to me. O

Amen.

INVITATION TO LIGHT CANDLES

All who wish may come forward to light candles in memory of someone or something, or as a sign of hope.

Instrumental music plays during the lighting of candles.

A TIME OF SILENCE

Why did my mother hold me on her knees?
 Why did she feed me at her breast?

If I had died then, I would be at rest now,
 sleeping like the kings and rulers
 who rebuilt ancient palaces.

Reflections

Most of us like silent suffering. Well, perhaps we don't like it, but we don't know what good it will do to complain out loud. We feel that it is easier to sit in silent suffering rather than burdening our friends with our problems. We fail to see that our suffering accomplishes nothing more than making ourselves feel worse.

This year has brought a lot of silent suffering. From the pandemic to racially motivated violence to the anxiety ridden insecurities of politics and the uncertainties brought on by global warming, we are all suffering. The worst is our own personal losses this year: the loss of a loved one or the loss of control.

Job sat in the ashes wailing at God. Little did he know, God listens. God is big enough to handle his complaints. There is nothing too big, too painful, too terrible that God cannot handle it. Give your pain and anxiety to God. From Job, we take the lesson that we can complain to God.

Instrumental Meditation

SECOND STORY

God has turned my wailing into dancing

Psalm 30:1-8, 11-12 (NRSV)

I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up,
and did not let my foes rejoice over me.

O Lord my God, I cried to you for help,
and you have healed me.

O Lord, you brought up my soul from Sheol,
restored me to life from among those gone down to the
Pit.

Sing praises to the Lord, O you his faithful ones,
and give thanks to his holy name.

For his anger is but for a moment;
his favor is for a lifetime.

Weeping may linger for the night,
but joy comes with the morning.

As for me, I said in my prosperity,
“I shall never be moved.”

By your favor, O Lord,
you had established me as a strong mountain;
you hid your face;
I was dismayed.

To you, O Lord, I cried,
and to the Lord I made supplication:

You have turned my mourning into dancing;
you have taken off my sackcloth
and clothed me with joy,

PRAYER FOR THE SEASON

led by Chaplain Mike Ballinger

O God of all seasons and senses, grant us the sense of your
timing to submit gracefully and rejoice quietly in the turn of
the seasons.

O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer.
When I call an - swer me. O Lord, hear my prayer, O
Lord, hear my prayer. Come and lis-ten to me. O

In this season of short days and long nights, of grey and white
and cold, teach us the lessons of endings;
children growing,
friends leaving,
loved ones dying,
grieving over,
grudges over,
blaming over,
excuses over.
O God, grant us a sense of your timing.

O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer.
When I call an - swer me. O Lord, hear my prayer, O
Lord, hear my prayer. Come and lis-ten to me. O

PRAYER OF LAMENT

led by Pastor Wade Forde

Leader: Do not remember against us the sins of our ancestors; let your compassion come quickly to meet us, for we are brought very low. Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; deliver us, and forgive us, for your name's sake. Why should we say, "Where is their God?"

People: **Sometimes our world seems dark and we feel alone. We grasp for help, often seeking solutions that end up hurting us even more. Hear our cry, O God of mercy.**

Leader: How long, Lord? Will you always forget me? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I scheme just to survive, my mind in anguish every day? How long will my enemy rise against me?

People: **Sometimes things fall apart, we are hurt and confused. We look for guidance and turn to those who lead us astray. See our dilemma, O Lord of hope!**

Leader: Respect your covenant; for the dark places of the land are full of violence. Do not let the humble be disgraced; let the poor and needy praise your name. Arise, O God, plead my cause; remember how fools scoff at you all day! Do not forget the cry of your foes, in constant uproar, rebelling against you.

People: **We are tempted to trust only ourselves; we are angry and fearful. We call on you, even demand that you hear our prayers. For you are the one who created us.**

so that my soul may praise you and not be silent.
O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever.

Reflections

The pain of our loss is great. Where can we turn to find someone to listen to our complaints? Like Job, we too sometimes prefer to sit in the ashes and mourn our losses. But as we sit in the ashes with Job, we too can learn the lesson that there is no problem too boundless, no loss so great that we cannot complain to God. Even as we question our own existence, God is there for us through the pain and the grief.

The Psalmist also knew that God listens to our wailing. While the pain we feel seems to fester in our hearts, God is there waiting for us to turn to God. Through God's love and strength our grief is transformed, the sadness we feel will be lifted. No longer will we be crying out in pain but one day we will be dancing with God. While this seems far off today, God is ever present just waiting for us to turn to God.

Allow God to take on your pain. God gives us the strength to endure. The psalmist tells us that as we make it through the night, we will find in the morning new hope. God sends the help we need in time of trouble. From the psalmist we learn that God gives us the strength to endure to help us through the darkness of the night.

Instrumental Meditation

THIRD STORY

All things will be made new

*Revelation 21:1-7
(The Good News Bible)*

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth disappeared, and the sea vanished. And I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared and ready, like a bride dressed to meet her husband. I heard a loud voice speaking from the throne: "Now God's home is with people! He will live with them, and they shall be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared."

Then the one who sits on the throne said, "And now I make all things new!" He also said to me, "Write this, because these words are true and can be trusted." And he said, "It is done! I am the first and the last, the beginning and the end. To anyone who is thirsty I will give the right to drink from the spring of the water of life without paying for it. Those who win the victory will receive this from me: I will be their God, and they will be my children."

Reflections

As we awake from our grief, we find that the world has changed. Maybe it is because the person we lost is no longer with us. Or maybe it is because the occupation that we used to define ourselves is gone. We awake from our grief seeing that all has changed, and we do not recognize the world around us.

It is true. Everything has changed. The world looks different now. Our loss has made it so. The Psalmist knew that all things look different when we have made it through the dark

night of our losses. The morning brings a new heaven and a new earth. Nothing will be the same again for us.

If we allow ourselves to take on these changes and to see them not as nightmare but as a new beginning, we too can drink from the spring of life. There will never be a time we will not hurt when we remember our losses. The glance that brings the image of the one we loved. The remembrance of the job we had or the place we called home, will always be in our hearts. Over time and with God's healing, it will shrink bringing a new way to see the world around us. Through God there is hope.

Instrumental Meditation