

## **A BLUE CHRISTMAS SERVICE**

By RAY BEAVER

### **Words of Welcome**

Welcome to this Longest Night service. This service is written by Ray Beaver and is offered by the Northern Texas/Northern Louisiana Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

This is a time to honor the loneliness and sorrow that accompanies the Christmas season, especially for those of us who have lost loved ones. I invite you to gather four candles to be used later in the service.

### **1) The Approach**

#### **Call to Worship** (from Isaiah 9)

*“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, you have broken in pieces, O God, or renewer.”*

#### **Opening Prayer**

God of Mercy, hear us as we pray in this Advent Season for ourselves, for our families, and for all who live with the painful memories of loss. We ask for strength in this day, courage for tomorrow and peace with the past. We ask these things in the name of Christ who shares our life in joy and sorrow; through the death and new birth, despair and promise. Amen.

### **2) First Lesson: Isaiah 40**

Our first scripture reading comes from the Book of Isaiah. It was written in a time when many of the people of Judah had been taken as captives into exile in Babylon, and were feeling crushed and without hope.

Isaiah 40:1-2, 12, 27-31

*“Comfort, O comfort my people.” Says your God. “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.”*

*Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?*

*Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God?” 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. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the*

*powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; 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.*

### **3) Responsive Psalm 121**

**One:** I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come?

**Many:** **My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.**

**One:** He will not let your foot to be moved. The one who keeps you will not slumber.

**Many:** **He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.**

**One:** The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.

**Many:** **The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.**

**One:** The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.

**Many:** **The Lord shall preserve your going out and our coming in from this time on and forevermore.**

### **4) Gospel Lesson: John 1**

*(John 1:1-14) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and glory. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has never overpowered it. The true light that enlightens all people was coming into the world. And the word was made flesh and lived among us; and we saw his glory, full of grace and truth."*

### **5) Message:**

*To come*

### **Responding to God's Word**

**6) A Liturgy of Remembering with the candles of the Advent Wreath.**

**One:** Please light the first candle. This first candle we light to remember those whom we have loved and lost.

We pause to remember. (*Pause while the first candle is lit by \_\_\_\_\_*) We remember their name, their face, their voice, the memories that bind them to us in this season.

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

**One:** Please light the second candle. This second candle we light is to redeem the pain of loss; the loss of jobs, the loss of relationships, the loss of health. We pause to gather. (*Pause while the second candle is lit by \_\_\_\_\_*) We gather up the pain of the past and offer it to God, asking that from God's hands we receive the gift of peace.

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

**One:** Please light the third candle. This third candle we light is to remember ourselves this Christmas time. We pause to give thanks. (*Pause while the third candle is lit by \_\_\_\_\_*) We give thanks and remember these past weeks and months; the disbelief, the anger, the down times, the poignancy of reminiscing, the hugs and handshakes of family and friends, all those who stood with us. We give thanks for all the support we have known.

**All: let us remember that dawn defeats darkness.**

**One:** Please light the fourth candle. This fourth candle is lit to give light to our faith and the gift of hope which the Christmas story offers to us. We pause and remember. (*Pause while the fourth candle is lit by \_\_\_\_\_*) We remember that God who shares our life promises us a place and time of no more pain and suffering.

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

**All: Let us remember that though Christ has gone before us, he is ever with us.**

**7) Prayers of the People**

**One:** In the spirit of this season let us now confidently ask God for all the things we need, saying in the strength of faith "God, hear our prayer"; and responding together, and in your mercy answer.

**One:** For ourselves as we participate in whatever way we can this Christmas. God, hear our prayer.

**All: And in your mercy answer.**

**One:** For our families and friends that they may continue to help and support us. God, hear our prayer.

**All: And in your mercy answer.**

**One:** For the person we have loved that has died. For all the losses that we know, that all may be redeemed by your Easter promise. God, hear our prayer.

**All: And in your mercy answer.**

**One:** For all our family and friends that they may know love and peace and happiness in you. God, hear our prayer.

**All: And in your mercy answer.**

**One:** For the peace proclaimed by the angels on the first Christmas, to come throughout the whole world. God, hear our prayer.

**All: And in your mercy answer.**

**One:** God of great compassion and love, listen to the prayers of us, your people. Grant to all, especially the bereaved and troubled this Christmas, and to those who cannot yet admit the hurt they feel, the blessing we ask in the name of Christ who taught us to pray together, saying: Our Father, who art in heaven....

## **8) Benediction**

**One:** Let us share as benediction a hope for the future.

Benediction: The Irish Blessing (in unison)

**May the road rise up to meet you,**

**May the wind be always at your back,**

**May the sun shine warm upon your face,**

**And the rains fall soft upon your fields;**

**And until we meet again,**

**May you be held in the warmth of God's hand. Amen.**