



**Blue Christmas: *a service honoring different types of grief, loss, and pain in this season, and looking toward the hope of Jesus Christ.***

**VIDEO:** Participate on any device at 4PM on December 20  
[go.mysjec.com/facebook](http://go.mysjec.com/facebook) or [go.mysjec.com/youtube](http://go.mysjec.com/youtube)

*You can watch the videos at any time after their premier.*

**Welcome! We're glad you chose to worship with us today!**

### ♪ **How Can We Sing a Joyful Song?**

How can we sing a joyful song? O God, our sorrows hem us in.

When pain and grief seem all too strong, how can we sing a joyful hymn?

The world around finds songs to sing of laughter, mirth and happiness,

But these sound false and even sting when what we feel is deep distress.

And yet, O God, we dare to sing for in our grief, we're not alone.

You love this world and entered in by sending us your only Son.

You sent us hope — Emmanuel! O God-with-us, you bore our pain.

And so we sing, for all is well! In Christ, we will be whole again..

Words: ©2009 Carolyn Winfrey Gillette. All rights reserved. Music: *TALLIS' CANON*, Thomas Tallis, c1561.

*Celebrant* 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.

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

*Celebrant* Let us pray. God of abundant mercy, you have given us grace to pray with one heart and one voice, even though our hearts are broken and our voices tremble with grief and sorrow. Comfort, comfort, Lord, your Holy people. Comfort those of us who sit in darkness, mourning 'neath our sorrow's load. Speak to us of the peace that awaits us, of the balm of healing for our weary and wounded souls. We ask all this, trusting in the promise you have made to hear the prayers of two or three who have gathered in the Name of your Holy Child, Jesus.

*People* **AMEN!**

## Litany of Losses

*Celebrant* As we near the shortest day of the year, and the longest night, we gather, mindful of the losses that have multiplied throughout the year. As we look back at it all at once, we are in danger of being overwhelmed by its tragedies—sickness, death, division, violence, disasters, and more. Our aim tonight is to acknowledge this, to mourn this, and to know that in all of this, there is the possibility of more light. If we are to be overwhelmed, let it be that we are overwhelmed with the assurance that we are not alone.

We are able to do this because soon the days will lengthen, and the nights will grow shorter. Little by little, we'll see more light as we wait for the springtime of new life. The path to everlasting life is filled with the light of a new and growing dawn. Psalm 36.9 says, "Within you is the spring of life; in your light, we see light." 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.

Throughout this litany, we'll light candles on the Advent wreath. If you are able, I invite you to light your own Advent wreath—or any five candles—wherever you may be.

*Celebrant* We mourn today the loss of life.

*The first candle is lighted.*

*Reader 1* For so many, the pandemic has taken loved ones. We mourn the loss of those close to us and those whose names we do not know. We mourn those who perished while working to save other lives. We mourn our loved ones who died, not of pandemic, but of other causes. And we mourn the loss, in many cases, of our ability to be with them as they passed, our loss of gathering together for comfort in the ways we needed so much.

*People* **We mourn this loss of life. We honor and remember these beloveds. We pray for comfort and peace. AMEN!**

*Celebrant* We mourn today the loss of livelihoods.

*The second candle is lighted.*

*Reader 2* For so many, the pandemic has taken the security of food, shelter, care for families, and medical care. We mourn the loss of jobs, and of businesses that could not withstand the circumstances. These were not just businesses, but dreams born of passion and hard work. We mourn those who find themselves needing to rely on others for help when what they really want to do is to be able to help others.

*People* **We mourn this loss of livelihood. We honor and remember the dreams now deferred. We pray for sustenance and resilience. AMEN!**

*Celebrant* We mourn today the loss of love.

*The third candle is lighted.*

*Reader 3* Our society's dilemma, centuries in the making, has created such hatred, suffering, oppression, and ill-will. We mourn the loss of those whose lives were lost to brutality and violence. We mourn the loss of our ability to love one another despite our differences, as beings who deserve to be seen for their inherent beauty and worth. We mourn that black and brown peoples have perished and suffered at the greatest proportion in the pandemic of coronavirus. We mourn the pandemic of racism that still plagues the fabric of our communities.

*People* **We mourn this loss of love. We honor and remember the work of prophets who proclaim justice. We pray for compassion and change. AMEN!**

*Celebrant* We mourn today the loss of liveliness.

*The fourth candle is lighted.*

*Reader 1* For so many, this year has robbed us of our energy, our enthusiasm, and our sense of well-being. We mourn teachers and leaders and caregivers and workers who are struggling to help those in their care, themselves exhausted and needing the sustenance they give to others. 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. We mourn those we have lost to suicide. We mourn those who find themselves addicted to substances in order to ease the pain that feels unbearable. We mourn those who are experiencing their place of shelter as an abusive place from which they struggle to escape.

*People* **We mourn this loss of liveliness. We honor and remember that each person is precious and whole. We pray for recovery and renewed vigor. AMEN!**

*Celebrant* And now we light a fifth candle. Just as we will do later this week on Christmas Eve.

*The fifth candle is lighted.*

*Reader 2* We light this candle as a sign of our belief... We believe in the Light that has come and is coming.

*People* **This light casts its glow on all the prayers we offer. 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. AMEN!**

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## **Old Testament**

*Reader 1* A reading of Isaiah chapter 9, verses 2 through 7.

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. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onwards and for evermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

*Reader 1* Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people.

*People* **Thanks be to God.**

## Unison Reading

*Reader 1* Let us read in unison Psalm 22, verses 1, 7-8, 16-19, and 22-23.

*All* My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?

All who see me laugh at me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads.  
“You relied on the LORD,” they say, “let the LORD be your refuge.”

Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet. All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment. But you, LORD, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me.

I will declare your name to my kindred; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you. Praise the Lord, you that fear God.

## Gospel

Matthew 11. 28-29

*Celebrant* The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew.

*People* **Glory to you, Lord Christ.**

Jesus said, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

*Celebrant* The Gospel of the Lord.

*People* **Praise to you, Lord Christ.**

## Sermon

### Prayers of the People

*Reader 3* In the spirit of this season, let us now ask our God for what we need for ourselves as we participate in the Christmas season as people coping with loss, pain, suffering, loneliness, grief, sadness.

God of wisdom, we come to you as Christmas season begins—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.

*All* **Loving God, hear our prayer.**

*Reader 3* 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.

*All* **Loving God, hear our prayer.**

*Reader 3* 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 your peace.

*All* **Loving God, hear our prayer.**

*Reader 3* 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.

*All* **Loving God, hear our prayer.**

*Reader 3* 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.

*All* **AMEN!**

## The Lord's Prayer

*Celebrant* Loving God, hear our prayers this night. Grant to all, and especially to those in sorrow this Christmas, the blessing we ask in the name of Christ, who taught us to pray together saying,

*All* **Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. AMEN!**

## Prayer for the Night

A New Zealand Prayer Book, 184

*Celebrant* Let us pray. Lord, it is night. The night is for stillness.

*All* **Let us be still in the presence of God.**

*Celebrant* It is night after a long day.

*All* **What has been done has been done; what has not been done has not been done; let it be.**

*Celebrant* The night is dark.

*All* **Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of our own lives rest in you.**

*Celebrant* The night is quiet.

*All* **Let the quietness of your peace enfold us, all dear to us, and all who have no peace.**

*Celebrant* The night heralds the dawn.

*All* **Let us look expectantly to a new day, new joys, new possibilities.**

*Celebrant* In your name we pray.

*All* **AMEN!**

## Blessing

*Celebrant* Dear friends, life is short, and we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who make this earthly pilgrimage with us, so be swift to love, and make haste to do kindness; and the blessing of God, who Creates, Redeems, and Sustains be upon you and all you love and pray for this day, and forever more.

*All* **AMEN!**

## ♪ **Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus**

Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;  
 from our fears and sins release us; let us find our rest in thee.  
 Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art;  
 dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.  
 Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a king,  
 born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring.  
 By thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone;  
 by thine all-sufficient merit raise us to thy glorious throne.

Words: Charley Wesley, 1744. Music: *HYFRYDOL*, RH Prichard, 1830; harm. R Vaughan Williams, 1906.

## **Sending**

*Celebrant* Go forth in the name of the promised Christ! Alleluia, alleluia!  
*All* Thanks be to God! Alleluia, alleluia!

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If you have any questions, concerns, or pastoral needs, please call The Rev Diane M Murray, Rector: 920.860.5152

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