

Starview United Church of Christ
Blue Christmas Service
November 27, 2022, at 3 PM

PRELUDE

Sweet Hour of Prayer

WORDS OF WELCOME

CALL TO PRAYER

Pastor: The Lord be with you.

Congregation: And also, with you.

Pastor: Welcome, you who ache in your heart and know the reason why.

Welcome, you who feel heavy laden and aren't sure why.

Welcome, you who are weary of loneliness.

Welcome, you who battle chronic pain in your bodies.

Welcome, you who suffer from chronic despair in your mind.

Welcome, you who are fearful.

Welcome, you who are riddled with anxiety around every corner.

Welcome, you who are in transition.

Welcome, you who long for change.

Welcome, you who feel the weight of debt.

Welcome, you who are burdened with shame.

Welcome, you who are at the beginning of a diagnosis.

Welcome, you who near the end of a diagnosis.

Welcome, you who are a caregiver.

Welcome, you who have lost love.

Welcome, you who have lost hope.

Welcome, you who have lost faith in a good God.

Welcome, all of you...every part of you...into this holy space and time.

All: *No matter who we are, or where we are on our life's journey, we are welcome here.*

Let us be together, here and now, trusting that God is with us, too.

OPENING PRAYER

Pastor: God of Mercy, hear our prayers in this season of lengthening darkness. We come this afternoon, praying for ourselves, our family and friends who live with painful thoughts and memories. We come burdened with sorrow, loneliness, and sadness. We come seeking a place to set the heaviness down; a place where our words will be heard, and our feelings honored. We need a place where we can drop our masks of good cheer so our tears can flow freely and our faces can wear the cares of all that we are carrying. Be among us in this safe and sacred space. Heal us. Comfort us. Care for us, as we seek strength for today, courage for tomorrow and peace for the past. We ask these things in the name of Christ, who shared our life in joy and sorrow, death and new birth, despair and promise. Amen.

HYMN

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

OLD TESTAMENT READING

Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

EPISTLE READING

Revelation 21:1-5

GOSPEL READING

HOMILY

Rev. Laura C. Baker

HYMN

Abide with Me

CANDLE LIGHTING LITANY OF REMEMBRANCE & SINGING OF *SILENT NIGHT*

Pastor: This is the time of endings and beginnings when the small signs of dawn pierce through the night and something new is born. Let us light the advent wreath and remember the promise of fading darkness and emerging Light. We light the first candle to remember those persons who have been loved and lost. We pause to remember their name, their face, their voice. We give thanks for the memory that binds them to us this season, which anticipates Christmas.

Congregation: May God's eternal love surround them.

All sing: 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.

Pastor: We light the second candle to redeem the pain of loss: the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, the loss of health. As we gather up the pain of the past, we offer it to you, O God, asking that into our emptiness, you place the gift of peace.

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

All sing: Silent night, holy night. Grief abounds, ever in sight.

Christ now comes in manger bare, holds our loss in his loving care

Peace, at last, to be ours. Peace, at last, to be ours.

Pastor: We light this third candle to remember ourselves this Christmas. We pause and remember the past weeks, months, and for some of us, years of blue times. We remember the poignancy of memories and loss, as well as the pain of reflecting on our own mortality and the brevity of life.

Congregation: Let us remember the dawn that defeats darkness.

All sing: 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!

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

Congregation: Let us remember the One who shows the way and who goes with us into tomorrow.

All sing: 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.

Pastor: 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, and sadness. In response to the words, "Loving God, hear our prayer," you're invited to respond with "And in your merciful love, answer." Let us pray. God, we come to you as Christmas dawns with the pain growing inside us. As the nights have been growing longer, so has the darkness wrapped itself around our hearts. In this season of longest nights, we offer to you the pain in our hearts, the traumas that some of us cannot put into words. Loving God, hear our prayer.

Congregation: And in your merciful love, answer.

Pastor: Compassionate God, there are some among us who are grieving over what might have been. A death or a loss has changed our experience of Christmas. Once it was a special day for us too, but someone has died or moved away, or we have lost a job, a dream, a goal, or a cause. We find ourselves adrift, alone, lost. Loving God, hear our prayer.

Congregation: And in your merciful love, answer.

Pastor: God of the little ones, you sent your Son to be born as a baby, the Holy Child of Bethlehem. For some among us, Christmas is a reminder of what will never be, what used to be, or cannot be anymore. We hear the cries of your children everywhere – the homeless, the orphans, the sick, the hungry, and those in constant danger. While some of us may feel like Rachael, weeping and grieving with mothers in all places who have ever known the death of a child, others know the sorrow of barrenness and a fruitless womb. Please be near us this night. Loving God, hear our prayer.

Congregation: **And in your merciful love, answer.**

All: *Amen.*

Pastor: At this time, you are invited to walk to the Christmas tree and place as many blue ornaments of remembrance upon it as you feel called. You are also invited to light a candle, to represent the hope we have in Christ Jesus, the Light of the World who promises to bring us peace.
(Ornaments are hung; candles are lit)

HYMN

O Little Town of Bethlehem

SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION

Pastor: The peace of the Lord be with you.

Congregation: **And also, with you.**

Pastor: Jesus said, "Come unto me, all who 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 weary souls." Let us pray: Creator God, you made a world with darkness and light, and gave us the sun to warm us by day and the stars to guide us by night. You are forever bringing light into our darkness. Even when we shun the light, you send messengers who weave your words into our dreams and you stir up angelic choruses, which cause us to rejoice. Therefore, with all the people and creatures of the earth and all the company of heaven we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

All: *Seraphic Hymn*

Pastor: On the night that was to be a long and dark one, Jesus gathered his friends around a table. He took bread, lifted it in blessing, broke it, gave it to his friends, saying,

Congregation: **"This is my body, which is broken for you."**

Pastor: He later took the cup, lifted it in blessing, and gave it to his followers, saying:

Congregation: **"This is my life poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sin. Do this in remembrance of me."**

Pastor: Pour out your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts of bread and fruit of the vine, that through Christ's presence we may become a beacon of holy light and a source of hope for a weary world. These are the gifts of God, for the people of God. All things are now ready. After receiving communion, you are invited to kneel at the prayer bench for an anointing and blessing.

RECEIVING THE ELEMENTS

The ushers will give instructions as to when it is your turn to gather at the table.

Both wine and grape juice are served. Wine is RED; grape juice is clear. Commune as you feel called.

Come forward by way of the center aisle and return to your seat by way of the side aisle.

PRAYER OF THANGIVING

All: *Lord Jesus, we give you thanks for coming to us, in bread and wine, the stillness of prayer, through the reading and hearing of scripture, hymns sung, candles lit, and ribbons hung. Lord, we go in thanksgiving for the light of Jesus, who laid his glory aside, became obedient to death, and rose with healing in his wings. Give us courage and guide our journeys that we may bear Jesus' gifts of love and life and hope to a weary world. Amen.*

CLOSING HYMN

In the Bulb there is a Flower (Hymn of Promise)

BENEDICTION

Pastor: May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May the Lord's face shine upon you and be gracious unto you.

May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace, both now and forevermore.

All: *Amen.*

POSTLUDE