

Starview United Church of Christ
Blue Christmas Service
December 1, 2024, at 3 PM

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. 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

An usher will indicate when it is time for you to come forward to commune. 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.

After communing, please take time to light candles to remember your losses, grief, and pain. May the light of many candles, serve to remind you again of God’s promise, “Those who walk in darkness, have seen a great light. On those who lived in a land of darkness, a light will shine.”

Return to your seat by way of a side aisle.

MUSIC INTERLUDE *O Little Town of Bethlehem*

PRAYER OF THANGIVING

All: Lord Jesus, we give you thanks for coming to us, in bread and wine, the stillness of prayer, the reading and hearing of scripture, hymns and carols sung, the writing on blue hearts, and candles lit. 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* **Blue Hymnal, #638**

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

PRELUDE

WORDS OF WELCOME

CALL TO WORSHIP (Based on Isaiah 9)

Pastor: Turning our attention now to God’s Holy Word, the prophet Isaiah reassures us with these words:

“In the time of our sorrow, God is with us.
The people who walked in darkness,

All people: have seen a great light;

Pastor: On those who lived in a land of deep shadows,

All people: on them the light will shine.

Pastor: For the yoke that weighs them down,
and the burdens that rest heavily upon on their shoulders,

All people: God, our Redeemer, will shatter into pieces.”

OPENING PRAYER

CAROL	<i>O Come, O Come, Emmanuel</i>	Blue Hymnal, #119
	(Verses 1 and 2)	

EPISTLE READING		Revelation 21:1-5
------------------------	--	--------------------------

CAROL	<i>It Came Upon a Midnight Clear</i>	Blue Hymnal, #153
--------------	--------------------------------------	--------------------------

GOSPEL READING		Matthew 11:28-30
-----------------------	--	-------------------------

HYMN	<i>Sweet Hour of Prayer</i>	Blue Hymnal, #570
-------------	-----------------------------	--------------------------

HOMILY		Rev. Laura C. Baker
---------------	--	----------------------------

CANDLE LIGHTING LITANY OF REMEMBRANCE & SINGING OF ABIDE WITH ME (Blue Hymnal, #636)

For this time of remembrance, you will be writing on the blue hearts you received upon entering. These are for YOUR eyes only. They will not be collected. Instead, you may use them after leaving this evening, as a tool for your personal prayer time this holiday season.

Pastor: The first candle we light, is to remember those persons whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember their name, their voice, their face, the memory that binds them to us in this season. We hold them before God, giving thanks for their lives in ours.

Liturgist: *Please take a moment to remember those who have died. I invite you to name them, together, on a blue heart. (Moment of silence for writing...) Let us pray...*

All people: ***Lord, we each imagine taking our loved ones by the hand and leading them to you, the God of Eternal Love and Life. We give them back to you. Accept our love and thanksgiving as we entrust them to your loving care. We want our loved ones to be free from all sorrow and suffering and at home with you. We ask that you save a place for us beside them. We ask that you fill us with motivation and energy in the days ahead when we feel like giving up. Help us to find joy in the people, events and the beauty of nature which surrounds us. Thank you for the gift each of these people has been in our lives. We believe that someday, we will celebrate the treasure of love with them again, when we are all in your presence forever. May this truth sustain us in the days to come. Take our sad and aching hearts and comfort us. Comfort us, for we only feel hollowness and emptiness. God of sorrowing, draw near! Amen.***

All SING: ***Abide with me! Fast falls the eventide.
The darkness deepens, Lord with me abide.
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee -
Help of the helpless, O abide with me!***

Liturgist: *The second candle we light is to redeem the pain of loss: the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs with the security they bring, the loss of health in ourselves or in family members, the loss of joy and peace in our lives from the stresses which surround us, the loss and loneliness we experience when our loved ones do not share our faith. As we gather up the pain of the past we offer it to you, O God, asking that into our open hands you will place the gift of peace.*

Pastor: Please take a moment to remember the losses. I invite you to name them on a blue heart. (Moment of silence for writing...) Let us pray...

All people: ***God of mystery, we turn our hearts to you. We come before you in need of peace, grateful for the mystery of life and ever keenly aware of your promises of guidance and protection. We want to place our trust in you, but our hearts grow fearful and anxious. We forget so easily that you will be with us in all that we experience. Teach us to be patient with the transformation of our lives and to be open to the changes which we are now going through. Amen.***

All SING: ***Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away.***

***Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou who changes not, abide with me!***

Pastor: The third candle we light is for us who walk in darkness and seek direction in our lives.

God of the Exodus, who leads your people through wilderness places and into new lands, we want so much to have a sense of direction, to know where we are and where we ought to be headed. But the darkness, fear and questions paralyze. You ask us to be full of faith, to believe deep within ourselves that you are our signpost, wisdom and guide. You beckon us to trust in your steadfast presence. Your words to us are clear: "Do not fear, I go before you."

Liturgist: *Please take a moment to reflect upon your own wilderness journey and where and how you've sensed God providing direction and guidance. On a blue heart, I invite you to write a word or two describing your wilderness. (Moment of silence for writing...) Let us pray...*

All people: ***God with us in the wilderness, we cry out to you to be our guide. Help us to have a strong sense of inner direction and grant us the assurance of knowing that we are on the right path. Take our lives and use them according to your will. Amen.***

All SING: ***I need Thy Presence, every passing hour -
what but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who like Thyself, my guide and stay can be?
Through clouds and sunshine, O abide with me!***

Liturgist: *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.*

Pastor: On a blue heart, I invite you to write a word or two about where and how you are finding your hope and faith strengthened. (Moment of silence for writing...) Let us pray...

All people: ***O God whose spirit is known by those whose hearts are thankful, and who makes cheerfulness a companion of strength, lift up our hearts to a joyous confidence in your care. Where there is light and love in life, help us to find it. Help us to trust and enable us to grow in love's power, so we may be sources of light, comfort and encouragement to others. Amen.***

All SING: ***I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless.
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.
Where is death's sting: Where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still if Thou abide with me.***

SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION

Pastor: The peace of the Lord be with you.

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