

A Service of Comfort, Hope, and Consolation

Welcome to this service, a time when we can openly acknowledge the “blue” feelings we have at Christmas time, the reasons for them, and offer them to God. This service is held on December 21st, the winter solstice, which is also the longest, (and thus “darkest”) night of the year.

We will invite you to reflect on the pain, the loneliness, the grief or the sadness you may feel in this season, and offer it to God for healing and transformation. We pray that you will find hope and comfort in knowing that you are not alone. Always remember that God knows your pain, is present in it and loves you unconditionally.

We begin this service in silence and in a time of reflection.
May God help each of us to participate tonight and throughout the season as we are able.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Today we come looking for the Christ Child. We come, bringing our hurts, our worries, our fears. We come seeking relief from pain. With the psalmist of old we say, “O Lord, you are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living. Give heed to my cry, for I am brought very low.”

UNISON GATHERING PRAYER

God of mercy, hear our prayer in this Advent season for ourselves and for all who live with painful thoughts and memories. We come to you with heavy hearts that we find hard to unburden. We come seeking a place to set them down; a place where our words will be heard and our feelings honored.

It is especially in this time of year when the darkness of our spirits collides with the brilliance of Christmas lights, that we find it hard to express our losses. By coming together we find assurance and comfort that we do not suffer this longest night alone.

So come Holy Spirit, and be among us this night. Comfort us. Strengthen us. Care for us. Be Christ to us. Help us receive your healing in the midst of our pain, and find new hope for the days ahead. We ask for strength for today, courage for tomorrow and peace for the past, praying all these things in the name of Jesus Christ, who shares our life in both joy and sorrow, death and new birth, despair, and promise. Amen.

*HYMN *O Little Town of Bethlehem* (omit v.2) Hymnal #230

THE FIRST SCRIPTURE READING Isaiah 40:1, 25-31

MUSIC INTERLUDE: *Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence*

THE SECOND SCRIPTURE READING Psalm 121

MUSIC INTERLUDE: *In the Bleak Midwinter*

THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God of wisdom, we come to you this Christmas Season 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, we ask your healing blessings upon all who carry in their hearts sorrow they fear may never end, and wounds they cannot even put into words. For ourselves, as we gather in your presence, Lord, hear our prayer,
ALL: And in Your merciful love, answer.

God of mercy and compassion, there are those among us who are grieving over what might have been. Death or loss or hurt has changed our experience of Christmas. We remember that once it was a special time for us, too, but someone or something precious has gone away from us. 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. Lord, hear our prayer.
ALL: And in Your merciful love, answer.

God of grace, in the spirit of the season, grant all comfort to us as we journey through this Christmas season. We ask that you shelter and sustain all who wander or want or weep or are heavy-laden, that we may be lifted up in courage and find your peace. Lord, hear our prayer.
ALL: And in Your merciful love, answer.

SPECIAL MUSIC: *A Different Kind of Christmas* CARLA ELY

A LITURGY OF REMEMBRANCE SEE INSERT

LIGHTING OF INDIVIDUAL CANDLES

(You are invited to come forward and light a candle for yourself, for a loved one, or for a circumstance, placing the candle standing up in the tub of sand.)

Each of us comes bearing our own broken places. You are invited to come and offer that brokenness to the God who loves each of us deeply and wants to carry our pain. His invitation is for all: “Come to me... all who labor and are heavy laden, I will refresh you!”

As you are led, you are invited to come forward and light a candle. As you light the candle, remember that it is God who shines his light in our darkness and carries us in our weakness.

A READING FROM THE GOSPEL Matthew 11:28-30

*HYMN *Away in a Manger* (omit v.2) Hymnal #217

CONCLUDING UNISON PRAYER

Almighty God, we thank you for your constant love and for hearing us in our distress. We know that even when we cannot see or feel you, still you are there. Help us to remember you and to listen for your voice in the words of family, friends, and strangers. Kindle our hearts and awaken hope, that we may know you as you reveal yourself in the world and in our lives. Let the light of your Holy Spirit shine like these candles in the darkness, and grant that when we leave this place your light may continue to shine on all in need. Amen.

BLESSING AND DISMISSAL

He heals the brokenhearted
and binds up their wounds.
Psalm 147:3

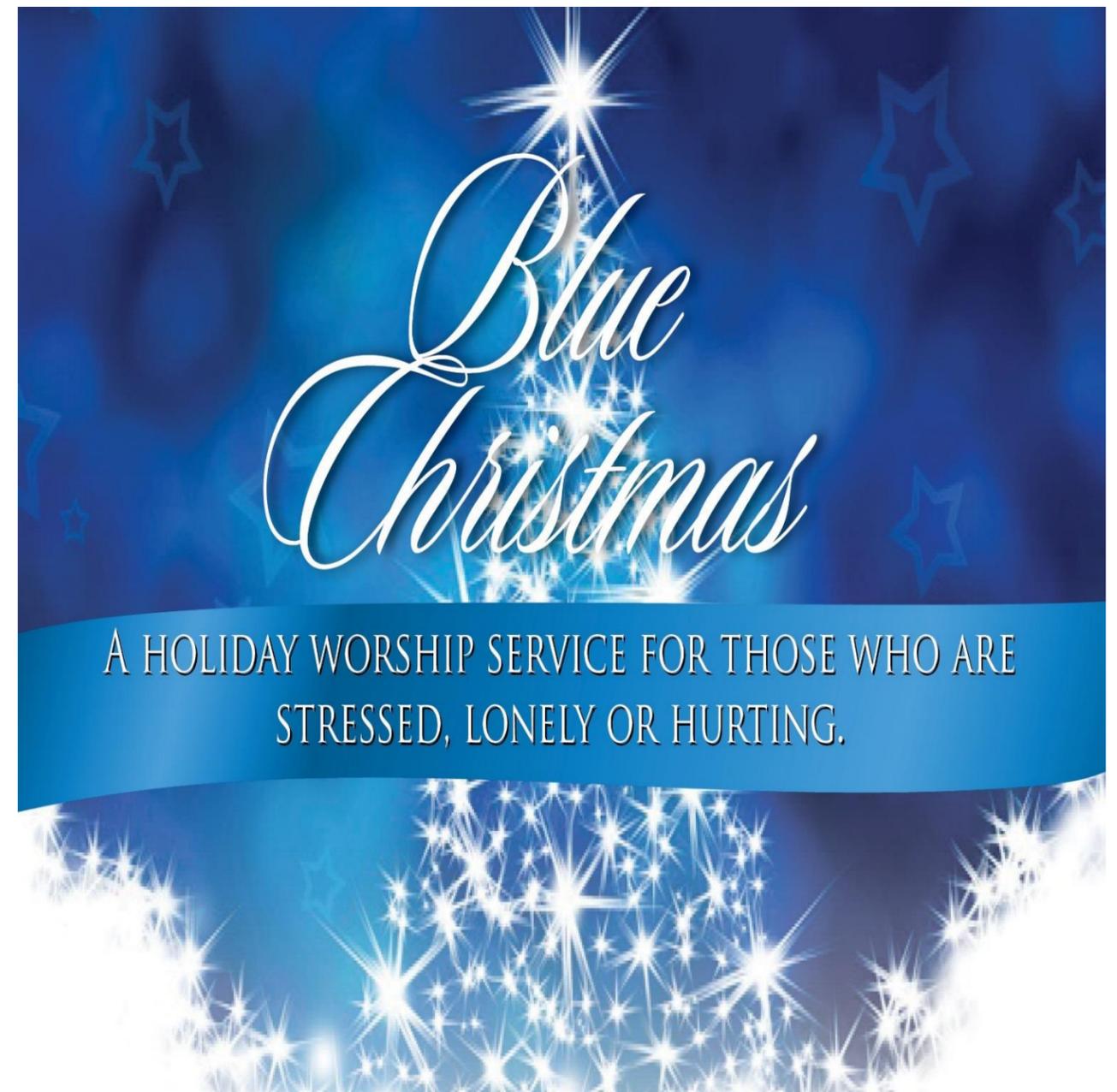
SPECIAL NOTES:

- ◆ The hymn “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” is a song of people in darkness longing for God’s light. It is not calling us to rejoice in the superficial, worldly form of the word, but instead is a cry for our spirits to reflect the true hope and joy that only God can give.
- ◆ There is an interesting convergence for this Winter Solstice day, as it is also the traditional feast day for Saint Thomas the Apostle (Dec. 21st). This linkage invites making some connections between Thomas’s struggle to believe the story of Jesus’ resurrection, the long nights just before Christmas, and the struggle with darkness and grief faced by those living with hurts, burdens or loss.

The Uses of Sorrow – *(In my sleep I dreamed this poem)*

Someone I loved once gave me
a box full of darkness.
It took me years to understand
that this, too, was a gift.

- Mary Oliver *(New and Selected Poems, Volume One)*



“Comfort, comfort my people,” says your God.

Isaiah 40:1

◆ DECEMBER 21, 2017 ◆