



Welcome to

A Blue Christmas Worship

Wednesday Dec 16th, 2020, 7:30 pm

Worship Leaders:

Pastor Steven Loweth, DLM

Rev. Lionel Ketola, BA, M Div.

We Gather as God's People - Words of Welcome

One: Comfort, comfort my people says your God. Speak tenderly to
Jerusalem

**All: May the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of
the Holy Spirit be with us all.**

Good Evening. Welcome to this Blue Christmas Service. Tonight we gather, not only to allow ourselves to slow down and take time for ourselves in this busy season, but also to give voice to the feelings we might be experiencing at this time of year – loneliness, or grief, or disappointment - and to allow God to wipe away our tears and give us hope for brighter tomorrows. As the New Creed of the United Church of Canada proclaims: “We are not alone...we live in God's world”. And so, let us gather before God.

Call to Worship

(based on Psalm 42)

As a deer longs for the flowing streams,

So, my soul longs for you, O God.

My soul thirsts for God,

For the living God.

When shall I come and behold the face of God?

My tears have been my food day and night

While people say to me continually,

Where is your God?

I See the Hope in God; **For I shall again praise him, my help and my God.**

Opening Prayer

Loving God, in Jesus Christ you showed yourself to be a compassionate God, which means that you suffer with us. In the quiet of the evening we come trusting that you hear our prayers...those which we voice aloud and those we utter with sighs too deep for words. We gather in the quiet of evening with friends and strangers, seeking your peace and comfort. In your love you accept us as we are...but you never leave us as we once were. Transform our sorrows, O God, that soon our only tears will be tears of joy and thanksgiving for all that you have done for us. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, God-With-Us, our Emmanuel. Amen.

Hymn O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (Instrumental)

We Listen for God's Word

Meditation

O Come, O Come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel that mourns in lowly exile here...until the son of God appear.

Christmas is a time of joy...We rejoice because God has come to us in Jesus Christ...but what a lot of people forget is that...if God's people rejoiced at the coming of Emmanuel...it was because they also knew what it was to suffer. Israel's history was full of sorrow...from the Exodus in Egypt to the exile in Babylon about which we just sang ...to the Roman occupation of Jesus' day. God's people knew what it was to feel lost...to feel like God had abandoned them...to feel that they didn't deserve all that life had dealt them.

But the prophets came announcing that, not only had God not abandoned them, but that God indeed would come to them personally, wipe away their tears...and give them new life.

Silence

Reading: Isaiah 25: 8-9**Heather Ashton**

Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

Meditation

And so, even as we acknowledge our sadness this night...perhaps even our own fear that God has abandoned us forever...let us also open ourselves to the hope that can be found in God's promises to us. Let us pray :

Prayer

We open our hands to you, Tender God,

We open our hands to you in prayer, aware of each breath you offer, aware of your calming presence.

We offer you our tears.

The unexpected tears shed in the middle of crowded places;

We offer you our tears and look forward with hope to a time when our tears will be tears of joy. Amen.

Silence**Reading: Mark 1 : 1-3****Mary Slate**

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, " See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,' "

Meditation

Mark's Gospel does not begin with angels whispering in Mary's ear. There are no shepherds watching their flocks by night; no wise men from the east following a star; no big-eyed animals standing around a straw-stuffed manger.

For Mark the Good News of Jesus Christ begins in the wilderness in Judea, with an old-time prophet named John. And that is Good News for us. You see, Jesus Christ comes to us...not just in those moments when life is neat and tidy...Hallmark Card perfect...Jesus Christ comes to us in the wilderness times of our life...times of death, times of loneliness, times of grief and loss.... Jesus comes to us in the wilderness so that our tears can become streams that water the dry ground and allow new life to emerge where there was once no life.

The road out of grief and loneliness towards new life in Christ is a road that begins in the dark and lonely desert places of our lives. Hope is found when we name those dark places and give them to God who commanded that every lofty mountain be made low; that crooked places in us be made straight; Let us name, in silence, those lonely desert places – the places of broken relationships, broken promises, the rough and painful places in our lives...the rocky roads that seem to hard to navigate. Let us open our desert spaces to God in confidence that even there, God can cause new life to spring forth.

Silence

Hymn On Jordan's Bank

VU # 20 v. 1-4

Reading: Matthew 1:18-24

Heather Ashton

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife.

Meditation

The story of the first Christmas is not really a happy story, but a story about life in the real world. Mary of Nazareth is engaged to the carpenter Joseph, and discovers she is pregnant. It must have come as quite a shock to Joseph. It's not hard to imagine his disbelief. What had he done to deserve this? Not in his wildest dreams would he have imagined that his life would have taken such a turn. He doesn't know what to do or where to turn. All he knows is that he doesn't want Mary to suffer public disgrace, so he plans to quietly break the engagement. Broken dreams, broken promises and a broken heart are all that were left. I wonder if Joseph ever...in secret...ever felt like crying.

This is not an easy time for this couple. Their country is under Roman occupation, and King Herod, who rules Palestine for the Romans, is known for his cruelty. Not exactly ideal conditions for bringing a child into the world! Yet, in the midst of their turmoil, God's messenger speaks to Joseph in a dream and tells him things will work out. That what seemed like a curse, would in fact be a blessing for Joseph and for others as well. And so, in silence, let us listen to God who promises to guide us through life's unexpected turns and to lead us to unexpected joy.

Silence

Hymn: Lo How a Rose is Blooming (VU # 8)

Reading : Luke 2 : 27-35

Mary Slate

Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God saying, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

Meditation

It was Simeon who said these words to Mary. Simeon was an elder in the temple. When Mary and Joseph entered the temple, Simeon approached them and asked if he could hold the baby. Simeon recognised this baby as someone who would have great influence in the world. In fact, Simeon recognised this child as the Messiah, the Christ. It was after his wonderful blessing that Simeon turned to Mary and said, "This child will face great opposition. He will not be accepted by those who have the power to destroy him." This child will pay a heavy price for his goodness. And you, Mary, your hurt will be so profound, you will feel as though your heart were sliced through with a sharp sword.

Upon hearing Simeon's words Mary must have felt as though someone had kicked her in the stomach, knocked the wind out of her and pulled the rug out from under her. Isn't that what it's like when devastating news is delivered?

Our Simeon announcements usually enter our lives abruptly and without warning. Simeon announcements come in the midst of life when everything may seem to be going reasonably well. They may come with a knock at the door or a phone call. Simeon announcements come in a doctor's diagnosis, or in the words « I'm leaving you. », or "Your services are no longer needed." Simeon announcements evoke a range of responses: shock, fear, anger, sadness and tears. But in fact, Simeon is not a prophet of doom. Simeon brings Good News. What lies behind all Simeon Announcements is the Good News of Easter Sunday...Yes, this infant Jesus, whose birth we wait for and will celebrate, will be opposed. Violently opposed. He will suffer in mind, body and spirit...and he will die abandoned on a cross...the most excruciating and humiliating death imaginable for a first century Jew.

And because the child Jesus died on the cross...we have the assurance that however profound our suffering...in body, mind or spirit...we who put our trust in him and are united to him...we will share in new life beyond suffering... And so, may we go from here in peace at peace and may a tear of joy mingle in our tears of sadness...for our eyes too have seen the salvation that God has prepared in the presence of all people...

Hymn: We Cannot Measure How You Heal VU # 613, v. 1, 2, 3, 6. (Tune: VU 472)

We Respond to God's Word

Offering our Tears and our Hopes to God

Choose one Christmas decoration that symbolizes your loss or struggles.

Choose a second Christmas decoration that symbolizes God's healing presence.

You are invited to place these two decorations together on your Christmas tree, or somewhere in your home to help you remember that even in the midst of our pain, God is with us.

Music In the Bleak Midwinter

Alex Hyunh Do - Flute

Indeed, it is to you, O God, that we lift our souls. It is for you we wait. As we gather here tonight, as we reflect on our lives and our circumstances, we acknowledge that we can not manage on our own...that some things are out of our control...that sometimes life just seems too vast and too complicated for us to understand all that is. Help us to be open to mystery... to the mystery of your healing and journeying presence among us.

Prayer

Tender God, your prophet Isaiah proclaimed:

"Fear not, I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God".

May our hearts be filled with gratitude for the gift of your great love, which never forgets us, never abandons us, and is with us always.

May our hearts embrace the gift of: "Emmanuel" – "God with us" – in the struggles and joys of our lives.

For this we offer you our praise and thanksgiving. Amen.

***Hymn: Infant Holy, Infant Lowly VU # 58**

Blessing and Commissioning

In the midst of this festive season,
among the lights and celebrations,
the sadness and the grief,
the hustle and bustle,
may we find time to draw a calming breath -
the calming Breath of God.

Every hurt will find its healing in the Christ child,
who lights our way to new tomorrows.

May the God of all peace
be with you this night and every night. **Amen.**

