

CHRIST CHURCH PRESBYTERIAN

December 16, 2018



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Christ Church Presbyterian Blue Christmas Service

December 16, 2018

4:00 P.M.

OPENING

This time of year, it seems as though the whole world around us goes crazy with incessant themes of joy and happiness. Songs like "It's a Jolly, Jolly Christmas", "I'll be home for Christmas" or "White Christmas" seem to promise everything will be ok. News stories abound of people experiencing some sort of hardship being showered with some abundance from total strangers who do so because it's Christmas. At times it seems like a vast conspiracy to somehow thwart all the difficulties we experience in life, that from Thanksgiving to New Years all of life's difficulties are somehow morphed into some pleasant and uplifting.

All of this, however, is as real as a three dollar bill. From the very first Christmas, the reality of the way life is on this planet has always been different. We experience grief, encounter harshness and find that the world around us generally does not care how or why we hurt. Our loved ones who have died don't suddenly become resurrected, we are not given new jobs with incredibly better pay and hours and people don't all of sudden become caring and nice. Even on that first Christmas, Mary and Joseph, having been forced by the census to return to Bethlehem, hard pressed to find an adequate place to stay and later to have a baby.

In other words, even the first Christmas was a series of dislocations. So as we come together today, we do so knowing that Jesus from his birth knew about dislocation of spirit. As the prophet said years before his birth, Jesus would bear our grief and carry our sorrows. We gather knowing that we worship a God who knows what it is to suffer. Here in the space we have set aside to worship, come and rest. Come and share your sorrows with the one who is called 'a man of sorrows, a person who knows sickness and grief.'

*CALL TO WORSHIP

I am dazed and completely humiliated; all day long I walk around mourning.

For I am overcome with shame and my whole body is sick.

I am numb with pain and severely battered; I groan loudly because of the anxiety I feel.

O Lord, you understand my heart's desire; my groaning is not hidden from you.

My heart beats quickly; my strength leaves me; I can hardly see.

Because of my condition, even my friends and acquaintances keep their distance; my neighbors stand far away.

Do not abandon me, O LORD! My God, do not remain far away from me!

Hurry and help me, O Lord, my deliverer!

I will cry out to God and call for help! I will cry out to God and he will pay attention to me.

In my time of trouble I sought the Lord. I kept my hand raised in prayer throughout the night. I refused to be comforted.

I said, "I will remember God while I groan; I will think about him while my strength leaves me."

You held my eyelids open; I was troubled and could not speak.

I thought about the days of old, about ancient times.

I said, "During the night I will remember the song I once sang; I will think very carefully." I tried to make sense of what was happening.

I asked, "Will the Lord reject me forever? Will he never again show me his favor?"

Has his loyal love disappeared forever? Has his promise failed forever?

Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has his anger stifled his compassion?"

Then I said, "I am sickened by the thought that the sovereign One might become inactive.

I will remember the works of the LORD. Yes, I will remember the amazing things you did long ago!

I will think about all you have done; I will reflect upon your deeds!"

O God, your deeds are extraordinary! What god can compare to our great God?

You are the God who does amazing things; you have revealed your strength among the nations.

-- Based on Psalms 38 and 77 selected verses

*CAROL Insert *"What Child is This?"*

A Prayer of Lament as taken from the Christmas story

"This is what will prove it to you: you will find a baby, wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger."

Eternal God, we bow before the mystery of your incarnation. As we consider our losses and our griefs, we find our God knows what it is to suffer loss. From your throne of glory you came to be born in poverty and laid in a manger. You have chosen weakness to confound the strong and poverty to amaze those who are comfortable in their material possessions.

We remember that you gave up everything in order to bring healing to our sorrow and comfort for our losses.

[*Silence*]

"Blessed be the Lord our God, for he has visited and redeemed his people."

The angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph and said,

"Herod will be looking for the child in order to kill him.

So get up, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt."

Joseph got up, took the child and his mother and left during the night.

Merciful God, we call upon you for all who have fled their homes in the darkness of night. You know the anxious nights of worry, times when sleep seems to flee and when all looks bleak.

You know what it is to be displaced and homeless. In our restlessness, may we know your peace that passes all understanding. In your displacements, you know ours.

[*Silence*]

"He has stretched out his mighty arm and scattered the proud with all their plans."

Herod gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its neighborhood who were two years old and younger. In this way what the prophet Jeremiah had said came true:

"A sound is heard in Ramah, the sound of bitter weeping.

Rachel is crying for her children; she refuses to be comforted, for they are dead."

Loving God, our hearts are heavy with the sufferings of this world. At times what happens seems so unfair. Innocents are killed, disease and syndromes stalk us. We long for the time when sin and death will be no more; when violence and sickness will no longer stalk us. O God, be our comfort in life's unfairness. Help us to see your love and grace when sight fails and the world around us is black with despair.

[*Silence*]

*CAROL Insert *"Little One, Born to Bring"*

"He has brought down mighty rulers from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly."

And Mary said: "I am the Lord's servant; may it happen to me as you have said."

Gracious God, you placed yourself in the care of Mary to show to the world your will to save.

Give us grace to follow her example: to become instruments of your grace, servants of your will, and channels of your love. May it happen to us as you have willed.

[*Silence*]

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior."

O God of peace, you fill our hearts with hope at every Christmastide, for we remember again that this is the world you have loved. Help us to remember in the darkness of despair that you have suffered so we can see the light of your love and grace. Give us the sense of your love so that hope, peace, and joy fill our hearts. Amen.

—based on Matthew 2:13-14, 16-18; Luke 1:38, 46-47, 51-52, 68; 2:12

ASSURANCE

Now when Jesus learned of this, he went away from there. Great crowds followed him, and he healed them all. This fulfilled what was spoken by Isaiah the prophet: "Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I take great delight. I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out, nor will anyone hear his voice in the

streets. He will not break a bruised reed or extinguish a smoldering wick, until he brings justice to victory. And in his name the Gentiles will hope.” -- Matthew 12:15, 17-21

Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles so that we may be able to comfort those experiencing any trouble with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow toward us, so also our comfort through Christ overflows to you. -- II Corinthians 1:3-5

Death, Be Not Proud by John Donne

*CAROL Insert *“For Those Tears I Died”*

A Liturgy of Remembering

(Using the Advent Wreath Candles)

The first candle we light is the candle that symbolizes love. We remember those whom we have loved and whose physical presence is no longer with us. We pause to remember their name, their face, their voice, the love that still binds them to us.

Thanks be to God whose love surrounds all of us.

(Pause while the first candle is lit)

The second candle we light is the candle of hope. While we grieve the loss of someone who was very important to us; someone who was a part of our lives, we also hope in the God who brings together that which was separated, brings life where is none and one day will restore all in creation that was lost. Our hope is in the God who loves us and died to bring us life.

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

(Pause while the second candle is lit)

The third candle we light symbolizes peace. As we pause and remember these past weeks and months, the disbelief, the anger, the down times, the poignancy of reminiscing, the hugs and handshakes of family and friends, and all those who stood with us, we give thanks for all the support we have known and for the peace of Christ they have shared with us.

Let us remember that dawn defeats darkness, life overcomes death.

(Pause while the third candle is lit)

The fourth candle is lit to remember our faith and the gift of hope which the Christmas story offers to us. We remember that God, who shares our life, promises us a place and time of no more pain and suffering; the coming time when we all will enter into the joy of our Lord and Savior.

**Let us remember the One Who shows the way,
Who brings the truth and Who bears the light.**

(Pause while the fourth candle is lit)

As the Christ candle is in the middle of the Advent Wreath, so too is Christ in the midst of our lives. Regardless of whether we are in sorrow or joy, Jesus is always there. He was there for Mary and Martha when their brother died. He cried at Lazarus' grave even though Jesus knew that he was going to raise Lazarus from the dead. He is the one who has come, who is present and will come again to rule forever. It is in his death that death itself is destroyed.

Thanks be to God for his loving presence. Amen.

*CAROL *“He Will Hold Me Fast”* (Join in on the chorus)

**When I fear my faith will fail
Christ will hold me fast
When the tempter would prevail
He will hold me fast
I could never keep my hold
Through life's fearful path
For my love is often cold
He must hold me fast**

CHORUS

**He will hold me fast
He will hold me fast
For my Savior loves me so
He will hold me fast**

**Those He saves are His delight
Christ will hold me fast
Precious in His holy sight
He will hold me fast
He'll not let my soul be lost
His promises shall last
Bought by Him at such a cost
He will hold me fast**

CHORUS

For my life He bled and died
Christ will hold me fast
Justice has been satisfied
He will hold me fast
Raised with Him to endless life
He will hold me fast
Till our faith is turned to sight
When he comes at last

CHORUS (Repeat Chorus)**Communion**

The Lord be with you

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to God.

GREAT THANKSGIVING

O God, you created a perfect world in which there was joy and love. Everything was good. Beauty and wholeness reigned. But because of our rebellion, loneliness became our companion, grief wrapped its arms around us, fear sang its carols to us, and our dreams turned to nightmares. Corruption warped our world.

But in the midst of our desolation, you entered our world. Regardless of the pain it caused you, you demonstrated your love for us. O God, in Christ we see death conquered by his death, corruption redeemed into incorruption and the presence of life displacing death the way light displaces darkness.

You are not only holy, O God giver of hope,
you know the pain we have felt,
you have mingled your tears with ours,
you have wept at the graveside of a loved One.

The angelic chorus told of your glory and wonder, yet Jesus left all that wonder behind to become human. He became poor so that we might become rich. He gave up all his rights and privileges,

having no place to call home and living because of the gifts of others so that we could have both home and a forever family.

He trampled death and sin into the dust, taking on himself our griefs and sorrows, so that we might find the path to life that is whole and complete, where promises are fulfilled, where a sure hope is the bed where we can rest our wearied souls.

We know we will find acceptance, because Jesus was rejected in our place;
we trust we know new life, because Jesus experienced our death;
we look to that day when all weeping is done, when pain and loss is behind us and
we are welcomed into that kingdom called eternity.

As your Spirit moved upon the waters of creation, filling them with life beyond imagination, may it move upon the gifts of this Table. We hunger for hope in the midst of despair, for life when grief seems to never leave our side, for wonder where there are only shadows. O God, you bring life out of desolation. Grant us your life in us, sustaining us with your love.

Our souls are parched from the deserts of our lives, we thirst for joy in a world burgeoning with
sorrow, the deep pools of love have gone dry, and you hand us that cup of grace which will
never run empty but will continue to fill us the waters of life forever.

On this night, remind us that your morning of hope will come;
 In our sorrow, wrap us in the swaddling clothes of healing;
 In our loneliness, help us to find you as the Friend who never leaves us;
 In our loss, whisper to us your promise that we will be fulfilled
 In the future you hold before us in the longest nights.

God in Community, Holy in One, be with us now and forever. Amen.

Words of Institution

The serving of communion

Prayer:

O God who loves us with a steadfast love,
O Christ who knows our grief and sorrows,
O Spirit who encompasses us with peace,

This day we ask for your comfort, that in our sorrow, we will remember your willingness to take on our sadness. In our grief help us to see that day when we will rejoice with you when all sorrow and sadness will be no more. Even so come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

***CAROL** *Blue* #36 *"In the Bleak Midwinter"*

Blessing

In your silence, may the Word dwell in your heart.

In your brokenness, may the Bread of Life heal you.

In your pain, may the One who can heal you touch your soul.

In the time of bleakness and numbness,

May God's peace which passes all knowledge be your portion.

Amen.

In the sure knowledge of God's steadfast love, Christ's grace and comfort and the Spirit's enabling and peace, let us go forth sustained in our difficult times by the Triune God. Amen.