

Advent ~ Blue Christmas Service

The Longest Night

Introduction: *This time of year, the holiday season and Christmas, can bring back memories of past pain and sorrow. It highlights and heightens new experiences of suffering. For some, this may be a time that has always been difficult. This may be the first Christmas without a loved family member who has recently died. This year, the losses and fears caused by the pandemic impact the Christmas season in many ways. These losses can make us feel alone in the midst of celebrating and joy. We need the space and time to acknowledge our sadness; we need to know that we are not alone. We need encouragement to live the days ahead of us.*

This service is designed to recognize and acknowledge these feelings, to give us comfort and support and to think about how this holiday season could be different. This is a time when we can allow feelings of pain, loneliness, worry, sadness, experiences of dark memories, anxiety and fear to be lifted up in faith to The One who can help us bear the burdens and relieve our pain. We are hopeful that we all will find peace in this service and comfort in knowing that we are not alone.

Welcome

The Reverend JMe Lowden

P: We extend to you a warm welcome on this cold December afternoon. We hope and pray that you will be blessed by this service as you remember those you love and acknowledge the pain and sorrow of these days and months of 2020. My prayer for all of you is that the light of our Savior Jesus Christ might shine through your darkness and grant you ever-lasting comfort and peace.

Prelude *Comfort, Comfort Ye My People* Paul Manz (1919-2009) Mr. Ricky Gearhart, Organist

Hymn of Preparation *In Deepest Night* (ELW 699) The Reverend Martha Miller Sims, Soloist

Invocation

P: God of Mercy, hear our prayer in this Advent Season for ourselves and our families who hold painful memories of loss, experience grief, mourn the loss of community caused by the pandemic, suffer due to loneliness and depression, and deal with crippling stress. We ask for strength for today, courage for tomorrow and peace for the past. We ask these things in the name of the Christ who shares our life in joy and sorrow, death and new birth, despair and promises. **Amen.**

Candle Lighting: Bringing light into the darkness

The Reverends Martha Miller Sims & Jonathan Boynton

Reader 1 We light our first candle- a single light that the deepest darkness cannot conquer – small, insignificant but a sign of hope.

Reader 2 Let it speak to us of the tiny flame of hope buried within us – the stubborn little light that refuses to be extinguished by all that life has thrown at it.

- Reader 1 We light our second candle a companion to the first – equally small – equally insignificant – but witnessing to hope that another light brings.
- Reader 2 Let it speak to us of the lights of companionship – of our families and our friends – of strangers and kindnesses found in unexpected places that restored our hope in human nature.
- Reader 1 We light our third candle recalling nights of watching and waiting – sleepless – anxious when dawn seemed to ebb further from the horizon and hope seemed forlorn.
- Reader 2 Let it speak to us of the sureness of morning – of the passing of darkness of suffering – and the promise of an eternal sunrise dawning for those we have loved and lost and dawning too for us – though we may yet be in that darkest hour before the dawn.
- Reader 1 We light our fourth candle – marking the closing of the Advent season and the immediacy of Christmas – a time of peace and joy we may not ourselves feel able to welcome – as our spirits dwell in dark and wintriness.
- Reader 2 Let it speak to us of hope – of being together in this time of healing and wholeness – of an end to the pandemic that causes so much pain- of companionship with family and friends that sustains us this night and into the turning of the year – of faith that we and those we have loved and lost are held eternally in the hand of the One who brought light into being – and who knows each one of us by name.

Hearing God's Words of Comfort

First Scripture Reading: Isaiah 9: 1-4,6

The Reverend Dr. Bill Boldin

But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. 2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness-- on them light has shined. 3 You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. 4 For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. 6 For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Litany of Hope: Psalm 121

The Reverend Jonathan Boynton

A: I will lift up mine eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?

C: My help comes from God who made heaven and earth.

A: God who keeps you will not slumber, nor suffer your foot to be moved

C: Behold the Holy One who keeps Israel shall not slumber or sleep.

A: The Almighty is your keeper and the shade on your right hand.

C: The sun shall not hurt you by day nor the moon by night.

A The Creator shall preserve you from all evil and shall preserve your soul.

C: Thanks be to God who preserves our going out and our coming in from this time forth and even for evermore.

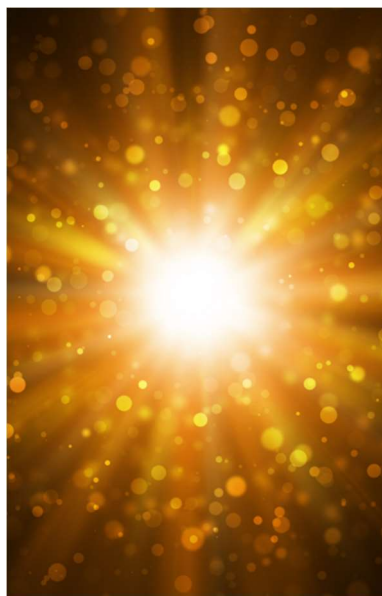
Second Scripture Reading: John 1:1-14

The Reverend Dr. Bill Boldin

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Meditation

The Reverend David Young



Hymn: "Comfort, Comfort now my people"



1 "Com - fort, com - fort now my peo - ple; tell of peace!" So says our God.
2 For the her - ald's voice is cry - ing in the des - ert far and near,
3 Straight shall be what long was crook-ed, and the rough - er plac - es plain!



Com-fort those who sit in dark-ness mourn-ing un - der sor - row's load.
call - ing us to true re - pen - tance, since the king-dom now is here.
Let your hearts be true and hum - ble, as be - fits his ho - ly reign!



To God's peo - ple now pro-claim that God's par - don waits for them!
Oh, that warn - ing cry o - bey! Now pre - pare for God a way!
For the glo - ry of the Lord now on earth is shed a - broad,



Tell them that their war is o - ver; God will reign in peace for - ev - er.
Let the val - leys rise to meet him, and the hills bow down to greet him!
and all flesh shall see the to - ken that God's word is nev - er bro - ken.

Lighting of the Christ Candle

As we light the Christ candle, we remember again the words of Isaiah, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness-- on them light has shined" and the proclamation of the arrival of the Word made flesh in Jesus Christ by John, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

Prayer of the People

The Reverend Sonya Giersch

A: In the spirit of this season let us now confidently ask God for all the things we need:

For ourselves as we participate in whatever way we can this Christmas. God hear our prayer,

C: And in your mercy answer.

A: For our families and friends that they may continue to help and support us, as we hope to support them. God, hear our prayer,

C: And in your mercy answer.

A: For the person we have loved that has died. For all the losses that we know this year and in the past, that all may be redeemed by your Easter promise. God, hear our prayer,

C: And in your mercy answer.

A: For all our family and friends that they may know love, peace and happiness in you. God, hear our prayer,

C: And in your mercy answer.

A: For the peace proclaimed by the Christmas angels, to come throughout the whole world. God, hear our prayer,

C: And in your mercy answer.

A: God of great compassion and love, listen to the prayers of these your people. Grant to all, especially the bereaved and troubled ones this Christmas, the blessing we ask in the name of Jesus the Christ.

C: Amen

Lord's Prayer

C: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen

Blessing

P: The life of our Lord Jesus Christ, who lived and suffered and died for the sake of all suffering and hurting people, yesterday, today, and tomorrow; the peace of God, which passes all understanding; and the presence of God's Holy Spirit supporting and encouraging you, be with you through this season of the year and always.

C: Amen

Closing Hymn "Light Dawns on a Weary World"

ELW 726



1 Light dawns on a wea - ry world when eyes be - gin to
2 Love grows in a wea - ry world when hun - gry hearts find
3 Hope blooms in a wea - ry world when crea - tures, once for -

see all peo - ple's dig - ni - ty. Light dawns on a
bread and chil - dren's dreams are fed. Love grows in a
lorn, find wil - der - ness re - born. Hope blooms in a

wea - ry world: the prom - ised day of jus - tice comes.
wea - ry world: the prom - ised feast of plen - ty comes.
wea - ry world: the prom - ised green of E - den comes.

Refrain
The trees shall clap their hands; the dry lands, gush with springs;
the hills and moun - tains shall break forth with sing - ing!
We shall go out in joy, and be led forth in peace,
as all the world in won - der ech - oes sha - lom.

Postlude

Jesus My Eternal Trust

Johann Gottfried Walther (1684-1748)
Mr. Ricky Gearhart, organist

Portions of the service were written and contributed to Whole People of God by First United Church, Kelowna, B.C., Canada.
Notice: Copyright 1996, Wood Lake Books. Used with Permission.
From sundaysandseasons.com license #SAS024465. Copyright © 2020 Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved.
Permission to podcast/stream the music in this service obtained from ONE LICENSE, License #A-720634. All rights reserved.
Prelude © 1962 Concordia Publishing House; Postlude Public Domain



Service Participants

Mr. Ricky Gearhart, Organist, Choir Director, Trinity Lutheran Church, Stephens City VA
The Reverend JMe Lowden, Trinity Lutheran Church, Stephens City VA
The Reverend Martha Miller Sims, Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Winchester VA
The Reverend Jonathan Boynton, Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Winchester VA
The Reverend Dr. Bill Boldin, Chaplain and Director of CPE, The Village at Orchard Ridge
The Reverend Dave Young, Bethel Lutheran Church, Winchester VA
The Reverend Sonya Giersch, St John's and Gravel Springs Lutheran Churches, Winchester and
Star Tannery VA

