

Blue Christmas: A Service of Hope



December 23, 2020
7:00 PM

PRELUDE Setting of *Deep Blue*

By Nancy M. Raabe (b. 1954)

*In deepest night, in darkest days, when harps are hung, no songs we raise,
when silence must suffice as praise, yet sounding in us quietly
there is the song of God. . . .*

CALL TO WORSHIP

On this long, dark night, we await the coming Christ.

We long for the light of his presence, with us and in us.

We come looking for Jesus, Savior of the World, who bears our every woe.

We come bringing our hurts, our worries, our fears.

We come seeking relief from pain, regret, and sorrow.

We come longing for hope in despair and light amid the darkness.

God—Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit—dwell among your people here.

God be present with us, hear us, and heal us.

GATHERING HYMN ACS 905 We Are Waiting for Jesus

We are wait - ing for Je - sus,
Je - sus brings peace. We are wait - ing for
Je - sus, Je - sus brings peace.
1 Bring your light in - to our dark - ness, we are
2 Good Shep - herd, walk be - side us, stir our
trust - ing in your prom - ise. We are wait - ing for
hearts, and gent - ly guide us.
Je - sus, Je - sus brings peace.

Text and music: John Helgen

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APOSTOLIC GREETING

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray. God of mercy, hear our prayer in this holy season, for ourselves, and for our families and friends who live with the struggles of illness, grief, sadness, and the pain of loss. We ask for strength for today, courage for tomorrow, and peace for the past. We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ, who shares our life in joy and sorrow, death and new birth, despair and promise. **Amen.**

PSALM 13

- ¹How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
- ²**How long shall I have perplexity in my mind,
and grief in my heart, day after day?
How long shall my enemy triumph over me?**
- ³Look upon me and answer me, O LORD my God;
give light to my eyes, lest I sleep in death;
- ⁴**lest my enemy say, "I have defeated you,"
and my foes rejoice that I have fallen.**
- ⁵But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart is joyful because of your saving help.
- ⁶**I will sing to the LORD, who has dealt with me richly.**

HYMN ELW 698 How Long, O God



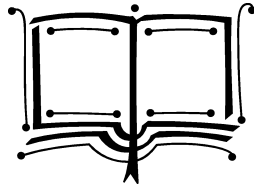
- 1 “How long, O God?” the psalm-ist cries, a cry we make our own,
2 The e - vil lurks with - in, with - out, it threat - ens to de - stroy
3 Your grace, O God, seems far a - way; will heal - ing ev - er come?
4 How can we hope? How can we sing? O God, set free our voice
5 “How long, O God?” the psalm-ist cries, a cry we make our own.



for we are lost, a - lone, a - fraid, and far a - way from home.
the frag - ile cords that make us one, that bind our hearts in joy.
Our bro - ken lives lie bro - ken still; will night give way to dawn?
to name the sor - rows, name the pain, that we might yet re - joice.
Though we are lost, a - lone, a - fraid, our God will lead us home.

PSALM PRAYER

Loving and merciful God, hear the prayers of those who cry to you, and shine with the light of your presence on those who live in the shadow of death. May we rejoice in your saving help and sing you songs of praise in the name of our risen Savior, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**



READING Isaiah 40: 1–2, 7–11, 28–31

¹Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. ²Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

⁷The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. ⁸The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. ⁹Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" ¹⁰See, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. ¹¹He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

²⁸Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. ²⁹He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. ³⁰Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; ³¹but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

The reader concludes: The word of the Lord. *The assembly responds:* **Thanks be to God.**

READING 2 Corinthians 4:8–10, 16–18

⁸We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. ¹⁶So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.

¹⁷For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, ¹⁸because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

The reader concludes: The word of the Lord. *The assembly responds:* **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION ELW 528 Come and Fill Our Hearts

Con - fi - te - mi - ni Do - mi - no quo - ni - am bo - nus.
Come and fill our hearts with your peace. You a-lone, O Lord, are ho - ly.

Con - fi - te - mi - ni Do - mi - no. Al - le - lu - ia!
Come and fill our hearts with your peace. Al - le - lu - ia!

Text: Psalm 136:1 (Latin); Taizé Community
Music: CONFITEMINI DOMINO, Jacques Berthier, 1923–1994
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GOSPEL Matthew 1:18–25

The Holy Gospel according to Matthew. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

¹⁸Now 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. ¹⁹Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰But 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. ²¹She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²²All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²⁴“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.” ²⁴When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

The Gospel is proclaimed, concluding: The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

MESSAGE

The Rev. Blake A. Scalet

HYMN OF THE DAY ELW 257 O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Verses 1, 6, 7

1 O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, and ran - som cap - tive
Is - ra - el, that mourns in lone - ly ex - ile here
un - til the Son of God ap - pear. Re-joyce! Re-joyce!
Em - man - u - el shall come to you, O Is - ra - el.

6 O come, O Dayspring, come and cheer;
O Sun of justice, now draw near.
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadow put to flight. *Refrain*

7 O come, O King of nations, come,
O Cornerstone that binds in one:
refresh the hearts that long for you;
restore the broken, make us new. *Refrain*

Text: *Psalterium Canticum Catholicarum*, Köln, 1710; tr. composite
Music: VENI, EMMANUEL, French processional, 15th cent.
Text sts. 2, 6, 7 © 1997 Augsburg Fortress.



PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

In the spirit of this season, let us now ask our God for what we need for ourselves as we participate in the Christmas season as people coping with loss, pain, suffering, loneliness, grief, or sadness.

God, we come to you as Christmas dawns with pain inside us. As the nights have been growing longer, so has the darkness wrapped itself around our hearts. In this season of our longest nights, we offer to you the pain in our hearts, the traumas that some of us cannot put into words, the disappointments too many to number, the loneliness and isolation that has become our constant companion. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Compassionate God, there are those among us who are grieving over what might have been. A death or loss has changed our experience of Christmas—someone has died or moved away. Or we have lost a job, or a cause. This year, COVID-19 has brought suffering to the whole world and none of our Christmas celebrations will be as years past. We find ourselves adrift, alone, lost. Lord, be with us and help us find our way. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

The Christmas season reminds us of all that used to be and cannot be this year, or perhaps ever again. The memories of what was, the fears of what may be, stifle us. We hear the sounds of celebration, but all we experience is a sense of feeling blue. Please be near us this night. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

I invite you to offer your own intercessions and concerns either silently or aloud or in the chat. Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work or watch or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, comfort the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for your love's sake. **Amen.**

NIGHT PRAYER

Let us pray. **Lord, it is night. The night is for stillness. Let us be still in the presence of God. It is night after a long day. What has been done has been done; what has not been done has not been done; let it be. The night is dark. Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of our own lives rest in you. The night is quiet. Let the quietness of your peace enfold us, all dear to us, and all who have no peace. The night heralds the dawn. Let us look expectantly to a new day, new joys, new possibilities. In your name we pray. Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

Let us pray with confidence in the words our Savior gave us:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

PEACE

Jesus says to his disciples, "Peace I leave you; my peace I give you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled or afraid."

The peace of Christ be with you always. **And also with you.**

Please share a sign of peace with those around you or in the chat.

HYMN ELW 753 Dona Nobis Pacem

1 *Canon*

Do - na no - bis pa - cem, pa - cem. Do - na no - bis pa - cem.

2

Do - na no - bis pa - cem. Do - na no - bis pa - cem.

3

Do - na no - bis pa - cem. Do - na no - bis pa - cem.

Text: Traditional
Music: DONA NOBIS PACEM, traditional

REMEMBRANCE OF THE DEPARTED

Let us remember before God all those who rejoice with us, but upon another shore, and in a greater light, that multitude which no one can number, whose hope was in the Word made flesh, and with whom in the Lord Jesus we are for ever one.

Rest eternal, grant them O Lord, **and let light perpetual shine upon them.**

Let us pray. **O Lord, support us all the day long of this troubled life, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes and the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then, in your mercy, grant us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**



CANDLELIGHTING

*You are invited to light a candle in your own home
as a sign of remembrance and a physical act of prayer.*

MUSIC Setting of *Es ist ein Ros & Dona nobis pacem*

By Thomas Keesecker (b. 1956)

PROLOGUE TO THE GOSPEL OF JOHN John 1:1–5, 14

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. 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.

POEM "I Will Light Candles This Christmas"

Howard Thurman (1899–1981)

I will light candles this Christmas,
Candles of joy despite all the sadness,
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch,
Candles of courage for fears ever present,
Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens,
Candles of love to inspire all my living,
Candles that will burn all year long.

BLESSING

May this eternal truth be always on our hearts that the God who breathed this world into being, placed stars into the heavens, and designed a butterfly's wing, is the God who in Christ Jesus became vulnerable, knowing our mortal frailty and human suffering, that we might know how strong is God's love for us. This is a mystery so deep it is impossible to grasp; a mystery so beautiful it is impossible to ignore.

Therefore, may God bless us and hold us, keep us and console us, now and always. **Amen.**

SENDING HYMN ELW 282 It Came Upon a Midnight Clear



1 It came up - on the mid - night clear, that glo - rious song of old,
2 Still through the clo - ven skies they come with peace - ful wings un - furled,
3 And you, be - neath life's crush - ing load, whose forms are bend - ing low,
4 For lo! The days are has - t'ning on, by proph - ets seen of old,



from an - gels bend - ing near the earth to touch their harps of gold:
and still their heav'n - ly mu - sic floats o'er all the wea - ry world.
who toil a - long the climb - ing way with pain - ful steps and slow:
when with the ev - er - cir - cling years shall come the time fore - told,



“Peace on the earth, good will to all, from heav'n's all - gra - cious king.”
A - bove its sad and low - ly plains they bend on hov - 'ring wing,
look now, for glad and gold - en hours come swift - ly on the wing;
when peace shall o - ver all the earth its an - cient splen - dors fling,



The world in sol - emn still - ness lay to hear the an - gels sing.
and ev - er o'er its ba - bel sounds the bless - ed an - gels sing.
oh, rest be - side the wea - ry road and hear the an - gels sing!
and all the world give back the song which now the an - gels sing.

Text: Edmund H. Sears, 1810–1876

Music: CAROL, Richard S. Willis, 1819–1900

BENEDICTION

Life is short and we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who journey with us. So, be swift to love, and make haste to be kind. And may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the † Son, and the Holy Spirit be with you now and forevermore. **Amen.**

POSTLUDE Setting of *Veni Emmanuel*

By Ann Buys (b. 20th C.)

CE

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JS

Ministers: The People of St. John's

Clergy & Staff

The Rev. Gladys G. Moore, Pastor

The Rev. Blake A. Scalet, Pastor

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