



**BETHLEHEM UNITED
CHURCH OF CHRIST**

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December 21, 2023

Blue Christmas

Worship Leader: Randy Koppenhaver

GATHER IN SILENCE

RINGING OF THE BELLS

CENTERING SONG

"Be Still My Soul"

Libera

WELCOME

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Come from your gifting to loved ones and near ones.

All: We are ready to let the buying and selling of Christmas go.

One: Come from the place of meeting and greeting friends and family.

All: We are ready to be quiet and wait.

One: Come from the place of reunion and loud conversation.

All: We are ready to ponder our loss and be quiet before the Holy One.

(Time of silent reflection)

HYMN #115

"In the Bleak Midwinter"

St. Michael's Singers

THE LOSSES WE HAVE SUFFERED

One: There are many losses in our lives:
the loss of a partner in life,
the loss of a grandparent,
the loss of a well-loved family member,
the loss of a good friend,
the loss of a loved one,
the loss of a pet,
the loss of good health,
the loss of work and financial stability,
the loss of a cherished dream,
the loss of faith...

All: We name our own losses silently, before God...

...moments of memory, the good ones and the hard ones, and reflection on the feelings that have been ours in loss. We pause and remember and reflect... (*Time of silent reflection*)

PRAYER OF APPROACH

One: You, O God, are with us and for us,
in our constantly changing emotions, your love never changes.

All: As we clash with the “holly jolly” Christmas,

One: your Spirit calms us.

All: As we dearly wish for the days before our loss,

One: your Spirit comforts us.

All: In those moments when it is difficult to feel anything at all,

One: your Spirit gives us hope.

All: In those days and weeks when we longed for life to feel good again,

One: your Spirit would not let us go.

All: And today when we contrast our grief with the celebration of the holiday,

One: your Spirit is ready to bring us peace. (*time of silent reflection*)

Eternal God,

All: your love will never leave us, no, your love will never leave us.

Amen

A READING FROM DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

THE FIRST READING: **Psalm 121**

THE SECOND READING: **John 20: 19-21**

THE THIRD READING: **Romans 8** (selected verses)

MEDITATION

SONG “Somewhere in your Silent Night” by Casting Crowns

OFFERING OF LIGHT

The story of Christmas tells how in a little hill town a homeless couple with tax problems took shelter in a stable among the animals and gave birth to a light that would change the world. Let us pray,

All: Gentle God of love, help us reach out together for the light of faith, for renewal and recovery and a new day coming. Grant that hope may come to rest in our hearts, and let it go forth with us into the darkness, this night and in the nights to come, until we see the dawn.

(At this time, those gathered may come forward and light candles as an offering of light to the burdens which darken you this holiday season. Please respect the space of others by waiting until the previous participant is seated before coming forward)

Song during candles: “O Come, O Come Immanuel” The Piano Guys

One: Lighten our darkness, we beseech you, O God; give us light in the night season; and by your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night. Amen.

SONG “The Hope of Christmas” Matthew West

PASTORAL PRAYER – following each petition will be a short silence

One: When it is hard to see the way ahead,

All: you are the Spirit that brings light, Loving God.

One: When life lacks zest or purpose, and we long for the person who is lost,

All: you are the Spirit that brings courage, Loving God.

One: When we know of loved ones or family members who are hurting,

All: you are the Spirit that enables us to listen and console, Loving God.

One: When we look back to good times that are over and gone,

All: you are the Spirit that revives significant memories and enables us to share them, Loving God.

One: As we remember those in our faith community who have suffered loss,

All: you are the Spirit that calls us to ask the simple question, “How can we help them?”

One: as we think of those refugees without hope worldwide and people at risk in their Ukrainian, Israeli, or Palestinian homes or other crying need,

All: you, Loving God, are the Spirit of compassion that compels us to speak and act to bring change.

One: And Loving God, when your Spirit seems gone from us,

All: you give us the blessing of Jesus, crucified and risen, the pledge of your presence in time and beyond time.

Amen

THE LORD’S PRAYER

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 debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

HYMN #135 “Silent Night, Holy Night”

Celtic Woman

COMMISSIONING

One: God’s Spirit goes with you as you leave this service.

When you can fully join the festivities, God’s Spirit is with you.

When you want to just be on your own, God’s Spirit is with you as well.

When your loved ones are sensitive and caring, God's Spirit is with you,
and when peace is hard to come by, God's Spirit is with you as well.
In all your good days at Christmas and beyond,
in all those days when life is hard,
All: God's Spirit will never leave us.

BLESSING AND DISMISSAL

**You are invited to sit in the candlelight as long as you like and then depart in
the same silence in which we gathered.

***Tonight's service, including the meditation was written by David Sparks

**"The Offering of Light used tonight is based on an order developed and used at The
Cathedral Church of Saint Andrew, Honolulu Hawaii."**

If Christmas is hard,

**When you've lost someone dear.
Just look in your heart,
And you'll know they're still here.
The stars in the sky,
The light falling snow.
The robin outside,
It seems like they know.
If this is a time,
When you're struggling through.
Just do what you can,
For what matters, is you.
There's no need to be merry,
There's no need to be bright.
Just do what you can,
It will all be alright.**

Author: Lorna Gibson

On Those Days by Donna Ashworth

On those days when you miss someone the most

as though your memories
are sharp enough
to slice through the skin and bone

Remember how they loved you.

Remember how they loved you
and do *that*
for yourself.

In their name
in their honor.
Love yourself as they loved you.

They would like that.

On those days when you miss someone the most
love yourself harder.

Get Me Through December

How pale is the sky that brings forth the rain
As the changing of seasons prepares me again
For the long bitter nights and the wild winter's
day

My heart has grown cold, my love stored away
My heart has grown cold, my love stored away

I've been to the mountain, left my tracks in the
snow

Where souls have been lost and the walking
wounded go

I've taken the pain, no girl should endure
But faith can move mountains of that I am sure
Faith can move mountains of that I am sure

Just get me through December

A promise I'll remember

Get me through December

So I can start again

No divine purpose brings freedom from sin
And peace is a gift that must come from within
And I've looked for the love that will bring me
to rest

Feeding this hunger beating strong in my chest
Feeding this hunger beating strong in my chest

Just get me through December

Promise I'll remember

Get me through December

So I can start again

Source: [Musixmatch](#)

Songwriters: Sampson Gordon Francis / Lavery Alfred
Paul

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