

BLUE CHRISTMAS SERVICE

An Ecumenical Service of Worship



Meditation

*The deeper the darkness the brighter the light shines.
For love refuses to be extinguished by despair.
Resilience and hope cannot be quenched
while the light of love burns steadily,
fueled by courage and by compassion.
Look for the light and there you will find love.*

Led by:

Rev. Greg Allen-Pickett, Rev. Elba Iris Nazario, Hannah Jensen-Heitmann & Dr. Rhesa Ledbetter

Musicians:

Hannah Jensen-Heitmann, Angie Amaya, Brett Epperson, Kendall Greene, Alayna Ham,
Tyler Koepp, Dana Miller, Morgan O'Neill, Kristen Schutte

PRELUDE

“Of the Father’s Love Begotten”

OPENING SONG

“Love, oh Love”

by Hannah Jensen-Heitmann

Love, oh Love, be my home.
Keep me grounded when I roam.
Love, oh Love for all my days,
wrap around me, keep me safe.
Love, please help me know that I can be
sad, and when I cry
Love, oh Love, be my friend,
help me see the light again.

Love, oh Love when night draws near,
be my candle, burn my fear.
Love, oh Love when pain takes hold,
heal my aching, mend my soul.
Love, oh Love, you're my blue sky.
This I know, and so will I
love oh love till time is done,
be a love for everyone.

WELCOME

Greg Allen-Pickett

CALL TO WORSHIP

Elba Iris Nazario

One: The days grow short and the nights grow long.

All: The dark of night finds its way into our hearts, our spirits, and our minds.

One: And yet, even though we may not feel it or see it, hope is on its way.

All: Hope for the future. Hope for the dawn.

One: The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light:

All: On those who lived in a land of deep shadow a light will shine. We keep awake. We keep alert. We wait for the Lord. We watch for the light to shine.

CANDLELIGHTING RITUAL

Greg and Elba

A symbol of this season for centuries has been the Advent Wreath. Each Sunday leading up to Christmas, we light one candle in anticipation of the celebration. Normally these candles represent hope, peace, joy, and love. For our Blue Christmas service tonight, we will repurpose the Advent wreath and its candles will take on new meaning for us. As each candle is lit, watch the light and warmth grow, and know that the light and warmth will return as we honor our grief, our courage, our memories, and our love.

CANDLE 1 - GRIEF: The first candle represents our grief. We light this Advent candle to remember those persons who have been loved and lost. We pause to remember their names, their faces, their voices. We give thanks for the memory that binds them to us this season which anticipates Christmas. We feel the pain of all kinds of loss, of dreams that go unfulfilled, of hopes that evaporate in despair. We bring them to you, O God, to be absorbed into your larger purpose for us. (Silence)

CANDLE 2 - COURAGE: The second candle represents our courage. We light this Advent candle to remember ourselves and our strength. We pause and remember the past weeks, months and, for some of us, years of persevering through pain and darkness. It symbolizes the courage to confront our sorrow, to comfort each other, to share our feelings honestly and openly with each other, and to dare to hope in the midst of pain. As we gather the pain of the past, we offer it to you, O God, asking that into our open hands you will place the gift of peace. (Silence)

CANDLE 3 - MEMORIES: We light this third candle in honor of the poignancy of memories. For the times we laughed together, cried together, were angry with each other or overjoyed with each other. We light this candle for the memories of caring, and joy, and sadness, and most of all, for all the experiences we shared together in this messy life we share on this earth. As we sift through our memories we hold them with you, O God, asking for help in finding joy to balance the heartache. (Silence)

CANDLE 4 - LOVE: The fourth candle represents our love. It represents the love we have given, and the love we have received. It also burns for the love that has been hoped for and love that has been lacking. Its light reminds us of the love that has gone unacknowledged and unfelt, and the love that has been shared in times of joy and sorrow. We look to you, O God, for new places and persons to share and grow the love in our hearts. (Silence)

CHRIST CANDLE: Finally, we light the Christ candle, remembering that Jesus Christ is always in the center of our lives. He hears our cries, he knows our hearts and, in the midst of all our thoughts and emotions, we light this to remember the glimmer of hope which God offers to us in the Christmas story. We remember that the God who shares our lives promises us a place and time with no more pain and suffering. (Silence)

HYMN

“In the Bleak Midwinter”

144

REFLECTION

Rhesa Ledbetter

RITUAL OF REMEMBRANCE – THE MEMORY TREE

PRAYER

Elba Iris Nazario

Comforting God, wrap us in your presence in this time of remembrance. We cherish the special ways in which we have been touched by our loved ones. May God’s eternal love surround them. We thank you for the gift their lives have been to us. With this memory tree, help us find your light, a light that will guide us day by day, step by step, as we try to live life fully and wholly. Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into your future. Remind us, O God, that dawn grows out of darkness. Comfort us, encourage us, empower us. Show us the way and go with us into our tomorrows. Amen.

PHOTO MEMORY TRIBUTE

“Mr. Sun”

by Hannah Jensen-Heitmann

(Thanks to Rhesa for collecting the photos and editing together this presentation)

The sun has said goodbye without much reason why.

I know that we'd be fine without an end.

And now the crescent moon has gone and changed our view,

and it's time for our hearts to say, "farewell."

We met under the sun and spent the day as one reminded of how sweet this life can be.

I know it had to end but just this once, my friend,

Mr. Sun, could you stay a little more?

It's turning out to be the best day.

I see the way you look at me.

And if the sun stayed out till the next day,

I know that we would both be smiling.

I know it had to end but just this once, my friend,

Mr. Sun, could you stay a little more?

I will not ask again,

but just this once, my friend,

Mr. Sun, could you stay a little more?

CLOSING RESPONSIVE REFLECTION

Greg Allen-Pickett

One: On this long dark night we wait.

All: We long for the light, with us and in us.

One: When our souls are deeply troubled, and our hearts break with the weight of sorrow,

All: May our grief be seasoned with love, and our sorrow be buoyed by hope.

One: In our times of feeling God-forsaken and estranged,

All: In our own vulnerability, may we recognize the presence of the divine, who bears with us, stands with us, and saves us in our weakness and pain.

BLESSING

Greg Allen-Pickett

As we leave this place, we take with us the love of God, the grace of Jesus Christ, and the community of the Holy Spirit. May these gifts help us always to comprehend the presence of God in our midst. May the peace of Christmas fill your hearts. Amen.

POSTLUDE

“Light Dawns on a Weary World”

The musical postlude is based on a hymn with the lyrics written below.

As you leave tonight, take these words with you. They can be read as a prayer for hope.

Light dawns on a weary world; When eyes begin to see all people's dignity.

Light dawns on a weary world: The promised day of justice comes.

Love grows in a weary world; When hungry hearts find bread and children's dreams are fed

Love grows in a weary world: The promised feast of plenty comes.

Peace grows in a weary world; When conflict fades away, the dawn of a new day.

Peace grows in a weary world: The promise of God's kingdom comes.

Joy shouts in a weary world; when cold know love's embrace, and friends meet face to face.

Joy shouts in a weary world: the promised dance of laughter comes.

Hope blooms in a weary world; When creatures, once forlorn, find wilderness reborn.

Hope blooms in a weary world: The promised green of Eden comes.

The trees shall clap their hands; the dry lands gush with springs;

The hills and mountains shall break forth with singing.

We shall go out in joy, and be led forth in peace;

As all the world in wonder echoes 'shalom.'