



**BLUE CHRISTMAS SERVICE**

Monday, December 21, 2020

St. Paul's Episcopal Church  
[www.stpaulslansing.org](http://www.stpaulslansing.org)

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**Whoever you are, wherever you come from,  
we warmly welcome you to St. Paul's Episcopal Church.**

This service will give us the chance to express the grief, fears, anger,  
and confusion that are a normal part of living and loving.

In worship, we will ask God for healing, and become again, ever-so-gently, ready to face  
a future sustained by hope and grace.

*It is important that you do what you need to do to facilitate your worship.*

**So please sit, remain silent, weep, or even pace,**  
as you feel the need throughout this worship service.

There are people who will sustain you  
with their singing, praying, and healing love.

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PRELUDE O Come, O Come Emmanuel

David Lantz

### THE GATHERING OF THE PEOPLE

*Presider:* Welcome to this Blue Christmas service, a time when we can, in company with each other, acknowledge the sadness we feel particularly this year at Christmas. This is the time of the shortest day and longest night of the year, when memories of past experiences and the pain of present reality can become overwhelming. Recognizing that this is not a season of joy for everyone, in this service we will be invited to reflect on the pain, the loneliness, and the sorrow we may feel and offer it all to our great sign of hope, the Holy Child of Bethlehem. We pray that all of us will find hope and comfort in knowing that we are not alone.

*People:* For you, O God, our souls in silence wait.  
**Truly our hope is in you.**

*Presider:* If I say, "Surely the darkness will cover me, and the light around me turn to night," darkness is not dark to you, O Lord; the night is as bright as the day; darkness and light to you are both alike. *Psalms 139:10-11*

Let us pray.

### COLLECT FOR ADVENT

*Presider:* Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

HYMN O Come, O Come Emmanuel

### THE FIRST READING

ISAIAH 9:2-7

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. 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. 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. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. 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. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onwards and for evermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

*Reader*        The Word of the Lord.  
*People*        **Thanks be to God.**

*The psalm is read in unison by all*

## PSALM 121

I lift up my eyes to the hills;  
    From where is my help to come?  
My help comes from the LORD,  
    The maker of heaven and earth.  
He will not let your foot be moved  
    And he who watches over you will not fall asleep.  
Behold, he who keeps watch over Israel  
    Shall neither slumber nor sleep;  
The LORD himself watches over you;  
    The LORD is your shade at your right hand,  
So that the sun shall not strike you by day,  
    Nor the moon by night.  
The LORD shall preserve you from all evil;  
    It is he who shall keep you safe.  
The LORD shall watch over your going out and your coming in,  
    From this time forth for evermore.

## THE SECOND READING

LUKE 2:8-20

*Reader*        A reading from the Gospel of Luke

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

*Reader*        The Word of the Lord.  
*People*        **Thanks be to God.**

## TIME OF REFLECTION

no room for you in the city, Jesus.  
so many doors were tried and closed to you.  
so many places did not warm you with welcome.

there is still a coming.  
there is still a Bethlehem.  
it is the city of my heart  
with no room to give you welcome.

it is the manger of my inner self  
where your request is made,  
searching for an entrance  
to my poor and empty dwelling.

Advent is a time of waiting.  
I will wait faithfully  
for slow recognition  
of the closed doors in my Bethlehem.

Advent is a time of yearning.  
I will keep on longing for you.  
I will try to do so patiently.

Advent is a time of hoping.  
I will seek the strong stirring sureness  
that it is possible to open doors.

Advent is a time of coming.  
I will pray with all the church:  
come. come. come, Lord Jesus.  
welcome into my home of love.

And Lord, when it is time to say:  
this is the Christmas day,  
I pray that you will warmly be welcome  
in the Bethlehem of my heart  
giving birth in my newly opened places.

*-- Fresh Bread, by Joyce Rupp*

## ADVENT WREATH CANDLE LIGHTING AND LITANY OF REMEMBRANCE

*Reader* We light this Advent candle to remember those persons whom we have 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.

*People* **May God's eternal love surround them.**

*Reader* We light the second candle to redeem the pain of loss: the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, the loss of health. As we gather up 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.

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

*Reader* We light this third candle to remember ourselves this Christmas time. We pause and remember the past weeks, months, and for some of us, years of difficult times. We remember the poignancy of memories, the grief, the sadness, the hurts, the pain of reflecting on our own mortality.

*People* **Let us remember that dawn defeats darkness.**

*Reader* This fourth candle is lit to remember our faith and the gift of hope which God offers to us in the Christmas story. We remember that God, who shares our life, also promises us a place and time where pain and suffering will be no more.

*People* **Let us remember the one who shows the way and who goes with us into our tomorrows.**

ANTHEM    Amazing Grace    Joel Raney

## INTERCESSIONS

*Presider* 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, sadness. In response to the words, "Loving God, hear our prayer," you are invited to respond with "And in your merciful love, answer."

God, we come to you as Christmas dawns with pain inside of us. As the nights have grown 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.

*Silence*

*People* Loving God, hear our prayer,  
**And in your merciful love, answer.**

*Presider* 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. Once it was a special day for us too, but someone has died or moved away. Or we have lost a job, or a cause. We find ourselves adrift, alone, lost. Lord, help us find our way.

*Silence*

*People* Loving God, hear our prayer,  
**And in your merciful love, answer.**

*Presider* The Christmas season reminds us of all that used to be and cannot be anymore. The memories of what was, the fears of what may be, overwhelm us. All around us we hear the sounds of celebration, but all we experience is a sense of feeling blue. Please be near us this night.

*Silence*

*People* Loving God, hear our prayer,  
**And in your merciful love, answer.**

*Presider* Holy One, for those who carry hurts and angers and other heartaches, help them to feel the peace which only you can give and the grace to let go of long burdening memories.

*Silence*

*People* Loving God, hear our prayer.  
**And in your merciful love, answer.**

Gracious God, for those whose faith has grown dim and whose sense of you seems far away, raise in their hearts a great yearning for you that will not cease; help us envision a future filled with promise, even if we cannot know what lies in store for us. Help us have confidence in your love as we take each new step.

*Silence*

*People* Loving God, hear our prayer.  
**And in your merciful love, answer.**

*Presider* I invite you to offer your own intercessions and thanksgivings either silently or aloud.

*Silence*

Loving God, hear our prayers this night. Abide with us when the darkness deepens. Help us to know and understand you are with us even when we cannot feel your presence. Let your saving help shine through the shadows reminding us that you share our sufferings. Let morning break upon our hearts, so that we may live in your peace and rejoice in your love. Grant to all, and especially to those in sorrow this Christmas, the blessing we ask in the name of Christ, who taught us to pray together saying,

*All* 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,  
For ever and ever. Amen.

HYMN What Child is This

### PRAYER FOR THE NIGHT

*Presider* 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.** (A New Zealand Prayer Book, 184)

### THE BLESSING

*Presider* May Christ, who by his Incarnation gathered into one things earthly and heavenly,  
fill you with his joy and peace; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the  
Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you this night, and remain with you always.  
**Amen.**



HYMN

*Come, thou long expected Jesus*

DISMISSAL

*Presider* Go forth in the name of the promised Christ. Go in God's grace, peace and love.  
Share it with everyone you meet, for we do not know the hurt they carry inside.

*People* **Thanks be to God.**

POSTLUDE What Child is This

David Lantz