

**Welcome to First Christian Reformed Church**  
**December 20, 2020 – 6:30 PM**  
**Blue Christmas - An Advent Candlelight Service**  
**for All Who Grieve**

Dear Friends,

Tonight's "Blue Christmas" service is specifically intended for those who are experiencing grief over loss. Whether it be the loss of a loved one, declining physical health, emotional anxiety, financial insecurity, etc. – nearly every human being has experienced some sort of grief over loss. The year 2020 itself has been filled with lament and loss for all of us.

The purpose of tonight's service is to create a sacred space for those who are grieving this holiday season. "Blue" services are intended to be thoughtful and meditative as together we reflect more deeply on the main reason for Christ's incarnation. The purpose of the service is to offer a message of hope and an assurance of God's presence in the midst of our darkness.

Generally speaking, this service often takes place on, or near, December 21 and is sometimes referred to as "The Longest Night Service." This particular service was adapted from previous services that took place both at Grace Community CRC in Oak Lawn, IL under the direction of Pastor Michael Kooy, Diane Ritzema, and Pastor Erik Kamp; and also at The Cathedral Church of Saint Andrew in Honolulu, HI. We are grateful for their work in planning this service and also for giving the broader Church permission to adapt and use it. .... May God bless us as we worship Him together this evening.

*In His Everlasting Love,  
Pastor John*

**Blue Christmas – A Candlelight Service for those Grieving**  
**Note: The service tonight will proceed unannounced**

**\* Please stand in body or in spirit**

*"Breath of heaven, hold me together"*

Prelude

Sung Call to Worship: *"Breath of Heaven"*

I have traveled many moonless nights  
Cold and weary with a babe inside  
And I wonder what I've done  
Holy father, you have come  
And chosen me now to carry your son

I am waiting in a silent prayer  
I am frightened by the load I bear  
In a world as cold as stone  
Must I walk this path alone?  
Be with me now, be with me now

Breath of heaven, hold me together  
Be forever near me, breath of heaven  
Breath of heaven, lighten my darkness  
Pour over me your holiness for you are holy  
Breath of heaven

Do you wonder as you watch my face  
If a wiser one should have had my place?  
But I offer all I am  
For the mercy of your plan  
Help me be strong, help me be, help me

Breath of heaven, hold me together  
Be forever near me, breath of heaven  
Breath of heaven, lighten my darkness  
Pour over me your holiness for you are holy  
Breath of heaven, hold me together  
Be forever near me, breath of heaven

Breath of heaven, lighten my darkness  
Pour over me your holiness for you are holy  
Breath of heaven, breath of heaven  
Breath of heaven

Songwriters: Christopher Neville Eaton, Amy Lee Grant

Welcome

\* God's Greeting:

\* Opening Prayer

Lord of hope, as night workers long for the sunrise,  
we long for the coming of Jesus Christ.

In our worship tonight, we yearn for your Spirit.

Give us glimpse of your glory, that one day we will see in full,  
when all will be made new, through Christ, our Lord, our light.  
Amen.

Opening Song: *"O Come, Emmanuel"* – Elaine Hagenburg

Opening Scripture Readings:

Song of Response: *"Glory in the Darkest Place"* –

*(During the singing of this song the Christ Candle is lit)*

*"Be forever near me, breath of Heaven."*

We Remember and Seek Comfort - A Litany of Remembrance:

**We Remember Those Who Have Been Loved and Lost:**

Reader #1: As we light the first Advent candle,  
we remember those who have been loved and  
lost. We silently remember their names, their  
faces, their voices. We give thanks for the  
memory that binds them to us this season.  
O Lord, surround us all with your eternal love.

Soloist: LUYH #61 *"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"* v. 1

1. O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
and ransom captive Israel  
that mourns in lonely exile here  
until the Son of God appear.

*(During the singing of this verse the first candle is lit)*

Time of Silence

Reader #2: Words of Comfort (Psalm 103:13-17)

<sup>13</sup>As a father has compassion on his children,  
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear

him; <sup>14</sup> for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. <sup>15</sup> The life of mortals is like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field; <sup>16</sup> the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. <sup>17</sup> But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children—

### **We Remember Other Occasions of Loss**

Reader #1: As we light the second Advent candle, we do so mindful of the many different sources of loss and grief: the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, or the loss of health. As we gather up all our pain, we offer it to you, O God, Asking that into our open hands you will place the gift of peace.  
Hold us, help us, heal us, O God.

Song of Response: LUYH #61 *"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"* v. 6

6. O come, O Bright and Morning Star,  
and bring us comfort from afar!  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night  
and death's dark shadows put to flight.

*(During the singing of this verse the second candle is lit)*

Time of Silence

### **We Acknowledge our Pain**

Reader #1: As we light the third Advent candle, we do so acknowledging the pain of our loss this Christmas season. We pause to remember the past weeks, months, And, for some of us, years of difficult times. In the tenderness of our memories, we feel all the grief, all the sadness, all the hurts, and all the fears. Tonight, we entrust them to Jesus Christ, the suffering Servant who is victorious over death itself. We remember that the dawn overcomes the darkness.

Song of Response: LUYH #61 *“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”* v. 5

5. O come, O Key of David, come  
and open wide our heavenly home.  
Make safe the way that leads on high,  
and close the path to misery.

*(During the singing of this verse the third candle is lit)*

Time of Silence

### **Gratitude for Those Who’ve Journeyed with Us**

Reader #1: As we light the fourth Advent candle,  
we do so honoring and remembering all who  
have shared in our sorrow.  
We thank you, Lord, for their compassion,  
for their presence with us in times when our  
hurt went deeper than words could express.  
We remember that you, Lord, sent your Holy  
Spirit to sympathize with our weakness and to  
carry our sorrows. We thank you that for those  
who held us and pointed to your light.

Song of Response: LUYH #61 *“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”* v. 7

7. O come, desire of nations, bind  
all peoples in one heart and mind.  
Bid all our sad divisions cease,  
and be thyself our King of peace.

*Refrain*

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to thee, O Israel.*

*(During the singing of this verse the fourth candle is lit)*

Time of Silence

Reader #2: Words of Comfort (Matthew 5:4, 7)  
<sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.  
  
<sup>7</sup> Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.

Prayer of Comfort: (Based on Psalm 90:12 and Isaiah 40:6-8)

Song of Trust: *"The Lord's My Shepherd"* (Townend)

1. The Lord's my Shepherd I'll not want  
He makes me lie in pastures green  
He leads me by the still, still waters  
His goodness restores my soul

*Chorus*

And I will trust in You alone  
And I will trust in You alone  
For Your endless mercy follows me  
Your goodness will lead me home

*Descant (sung as echo to chorus)*

I will trust I will trust in You  
I will trust I will trust in You  
Endless mercy follows me  
Goodness will lead me home

2. He guides my ways in righteousness  
And He anoints my head with oil  
And my cup it overflows with joy  
I feast on His pure delights

*Chorus & Descant*

3. And though I walk the darkest path  
I will not fear the evil one  
For You are with me  
And Your rod and staff  
Are the comfort I need to know

*Chorus & Descant (2x)*

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*"Breath of heaven, lighten my darkness"*

\* Scripture Readings: John 1:1-5 and Revelation 21:1-5

Meditation: *"A Light in the Darkness"*

Song of Reflection: *"To Thee My Heart I Offer"* – Elaine Hagenburg

A Prayer of Hope

We Light our Candles of Remembrance

- *"You Do Not Walk Alone"* – Elaine Hagenburg

- *"O Love"* – Elaine Hagenburg

Closing Words of Encouragement and Hope

\* God's Blessing (Based on Romans 15:13 and I Peter 5:10-11)

\* Closing Hymn: *"Silent Night"* – Tomlin/Getty

\* Postlude –

*(Please extinguish your candle before leaving your bench.)*

**Participants:**

**Reader #1:** Pastor John Knoester

**Reader #2:** Brooke Knoester

**Candle Lighters:** Pastor John Knoester and Brooke Knoester

**Pianist:** Danielle Van Zanten

**Vocalists:** Danielle Van Zanten and Henry Van Zanten

**Sound System:** Henry Van Zanten

**Projection:** Tim Hibma

**Sound:** Carson Blom

**Lights:** Clarence Klunder