

*Blue Christmas*

*A Liturgy of Healing & Hope*



*December 21, 2023  
4:30 pm*

*St. James' Episcopal Church*

## *Skaneateles, NY*

### What Is Blue Christmas?

Welcome to St. James' Church and tonight's celebration of Blue Christmas!

While this time of year brings great joy with the celebration of the birth of Jesus, there are many of us for whom this time of year is one of great pain. Perhaps it is the first Christmas without a loved one. Perhaps this time of year marks the anniversary of a great loss or conjures thoughts and feelings related to a past trauma. This is why Blue Christmas exists.

Tonight's liturgy is one in which we are still, quiet, and contemplative. We take time tonight to bring to mind those memories and images of pain and loss, and we pray for healing and hope. We light candles as signs of our prayers, write down those sorts, conditions, and people who are on our hearts this night, and we share in the Holy Eucharist, that sacred meal in which Christ's love is broken open for us, so that we who bring our broken hearts before the altar of God may find them mended.

Blue Christmas is intentionally celebrated on the Winter Solstice, preferably at dusk. This marks the longest night of the year, and for those of us living with grief and heartache this season, it can often feel like the nights are never-ending. Yet as we leave this holy space, we remember that from this point forward, the nights get a little shorter, until we are finally brought back into the full light of spring and Easter, when God brings new life out of that which had been frozen by winter.

As you enter the sanctuary, we ask that you do quietly and for the sake of those around you who wish to pray.

The sound of the ringing bowl will be your indication to stand, but please remember that if it is ok to sit if that is more comfortable. God will still be praised!

The music tonight is meant to be meditative and contemplative. If you wish to sing along to a favorite Christmas song that you hear, feel free to do so. Otherwise, you may wish to simply let the music wash over you as a prayer.

During the time of Music and Candlelighting, you will be invited to come forward to light a candle as a sign of your prayer this night. In similar fashion, you will find pieces of paper on which you may write your prayers, which will be deposited in the offertory baskets and placed on the altar as part of our Eucharistic Prayer. These participatory moments are optional, but we hope that you find some solace and peace in them. All may, some should, none must.

Whatever you are bringing with you tonight, we pray for God's mercy and blessings for you this holiday season, that you may know that God is with you throughout all the seasons of your life, and may the light of Christ that came at Christmas be your guide and guard all your days.

*The Presider welcomes the People.*

*A period of silence is kept.*

## Poem

*Wild Geese* by Mary Oliver

## Opening Song

*O Little Town of Bethlehem*

*Presider* Come Holy Spirit.  
*People* **And dwell among us.**  
*Presider* Be our light in the darkness  
*People* **And guide us into the way of peace.**  
*Presider* Let us pray.  
God of mercy, we pray for ourselves, for our families, and for all those who live with painful experiences of loss. We ask for strength for today, peace for the past, and courage for tomorrow; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord, who entered the world at Christmas to share our life in sorrow and joy, despair and hope, death and new birth. **Amen.**

## The Reading

*John 1: 1-14*

*After the Reading:*

*Lector* Here what the Spirit is saying to God's people.

*People* **Thanks be to God**

## Reflection

### Music for Meditation

*In the Bleak Midwinter*

*During the music, you are invited to write the names of those who have been lost or your experiences of loss and pain, as well as hope, that are weighing on your hearts and minds. Later, you will be invited to come forward and place those written prayers in the offering basket to be blessed as part of our celebration of Holy Communion.*

## A Litany of Remembrance

*All stand at the sound of the bowl ring.*

*The first candle is lit.*

*Presider* We light this first candle to remember those 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 in this season that anticipates Christ.

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

*Silence is kept.*

*The Minister leads the first verse.*

**O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,  
that mourns in lowly exile here, until the Son of God appear.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

*The second candle is lit.*

*Presider* We light this second candle to redeem the pain of loss; the loss of relationships, the loss of health, the loss of jobs, and the loss of financial security. As we gather up the pain of

the past, we offer it to you, O God, asking that you place the gift of peace into our open hearts and hands. We give thanks for your light that shines upon us and within us.

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

*Silence is kept.*

*The Minister leads the second verse.*

**O come, our Wisdom from on high, who ordered all things mightily.  
To us the path of knowledge show, and teach us in Her ways to go.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

*The third candle is lit.*

*Presider*      We light this third candle to remember ourselves at Christmas time. We remember the past weeks, months, and for some of us, years of difficult times. We pause to remember the poignancy of the memories, the grief, the sadness, the hurt, and the pain that reflects our mortality. We give thanks for the love that surrounds us on every side.

*People*      **Help us remember that dawn defeats the darkness.**

*Silence is kept.*

*The Minister leads the third verse.*

**O come, O rod of Jesse's stem, from every foe deliver them.  
That trust your mighty power to save, bring them in vict-ry through the grave.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

*The fourth candle is lit.*

*Presider*      We light this fourth candle to remember the gift of faith and hope that God offers to us in the Christmas story. We pause to remember that God in Christ, who shares our life, promises us a place and a time of no more pain and suffering. We rejoice, even in our sadness, that the Incarnation marks the beginning of the end of death's hold over us. We give thanks that God in Christ has come among us and still walks with us in every season of life.

*People*      **Let us remember the One who shows the way and walks with us through every journey of our lives.**

*Silence is kept.*

*The Minister leads the fourth verse.*

**O come, desire of nations bind, in one the hearts of all humankind;  
O bid our sad divisions cease, and be yourself the Prince of Peace.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

*All are seated.*

### **Music & Candlelighting**

*During the music you are welcome to come forward and light a candle as a symbol of your prayer. You may deposit your written prayers in the offering basket.*

### **Prayers for Ourselves & Others**

*Presider*      In this season of light, let us pray for all of us who are waiting in darkness.

*Presider* Glorious God, we remember your mighty deeds across the ages, the times you saved us and brought us home. Yet we also remember the times when we felt alone and afraid. Receive these prayers from your faithful people. Give us all strength and courage to meet the days ahead.

*People* **Look upon us with your shining face, especially in our time of need.**

*Presider* Redeeming God, we remember those who are oppressed by poverty and discrimination, by political upheaval and dangerous rulers.

*People* **Right what is wrong among us and within us, and restore us to you, to others, to our planet, and to ourselves.**

*Presider* Healing God, make the brokenhearted whole again; comfort those who mourn; repair our damaged world; and fill the hungry with good things.

*People* **In all the tossing and turning of our days, do not let us lose sight of you or those whom you came to serve.**

*Presider* Holy God, in the stillness of this night, we give thanks for the Light whom no darkness can overcome, and we rejoice in your promises, which are faithful and mighty to save.

*People* **Light of the world, live among us, full of grace and truth.**

*Presider* In all of our beginnings and in our endings, may we be one with you eternally; through Christ, and in the unity of the Holy Spirit, we praise you almighty God, now and forever.  
**Amen.**

*Presider* The Peace of the Lord be always with you.

*People* **And also with you.**

*The Ministers and People greet one another in the name of the Lord and are seated.*

## **Offertory Music**

*What Child Is This*

## **The Holy Communion**

*All stand at the sound of the bowl ring.*

*Presider* The Lord be with you.

*People* **And also with you**

*Presider* Lift up your hearts.

*People* **We lift them to the Lord**

*Presider* Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

*People* **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

*The Presider prays the Proper Preface, then continues until the Sanctus:*

*All* **Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might.  
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.  
Blessed is he who comes in the Name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.**

*The People remain standing as the Presider recalls God's work in creation and Christ's Last Supper.*

*The Presider prays that the gifts and People may be blessed and sanctified by God. When the Presider concludes the prayer, the People loudly respond, "AMEN!"*

*Presider* Holding our experiences of pain and loss, and looking with expectant hope for the coming of the Light of God into the world, let us pray together the prayer that our Lord Jesus taught us:

*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.**

*The Presider breaks the consecrated Bread. A period of silence follows.*

*Presider* We break this bread to share in the Body of Christ.

*People* **We who are many are one Body, for we all share in the one Bread.**

*The Presider invites the People to receive the Communion of Our Lord. All who desire a deeper relationship with Christ are welcome to come forward. If you do not wish to receive, please come forward for a blessing. Gluten-free wafers are available upon request.*

## **Music During Communion**

*Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence*

*When all have received, the Presider returns to the Holy Table. All stand at the sound of the bowl ring.*

*Presider* Let us pray.

*People* **Loving God, we give you thanks for restoring us in your image and nourishing us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood. Now send us forth, a people forgiven, healed, renewed; that we may proclaim your love to the world and continue in the risen life of Jesus Christ our Savior Amen.**

*The Presider offers a blessing, and the People respond, 'Amen.'*

## **Closing Song**

*Of the Father's love begotten*

**Of the Father's love begotten,  
ere the worlds began to be,  
he is Alpha and Omega,  
he the source, the ending he,  
of the things that are, that have been,  
and that future years shall see,  
evermore and evermore!**

**O that birth for ever blessed,  
when the Virgin, full of grace,  
by the Holy Ghost conceiving,  
bore the Savior of our race;  
and the Babe, the world's Redeemer,  
first revealed his sacred face,  
evermore and evermore!**

**Let the heights of heaven adore him;  
angel hosts, his praises sing;  
powers, dominions, bow before him,**

and extol our God and King;  
let no tongue on earth be silent,  
every voice in concert ring,  
evermore and evermore!

Christ, to thee with God the Father,  
and, O Holy Ghost, to thee,  
hymn and chant and high thanksgiving,  
and unwearied praises be;  
honor, glory and dominion,  
and eternal victory,  
evermore and evermore!

*Presider*            Let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord.  
*People*             **Thanks be to God.**

*The Ministers and People exit quietly.*

*Participants in the Liturgy*

Presider & Preacher  
Minister of Music  
Lector & Eucharistic Minister  
Eucharistic Minister  
Crucifer

The Rev. Joe T. Mitchell  
Justin Oei  
Sharon Arliss  
Sr. Marie Patricia Hughes  
Dave Palen



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