

BLUE CHRISTMAS SERVICE
DECEMBER 17, 2022
ZION LUTHERN CHURCH, TAMAQUA, PA

Prelude: "I Heard the Bell on Christmas Day" Casting Crowns

The Gathering: Even in our weakness, Christ arrives with strength and courage. Even in our sorrow, Christmas comes to bring hope and joy. May this promise take root in our souls, as we wait with patience for Christ and Christmas to arrive.

Gathering song: "Where Are You Christmas?" Faith Hill
Sing along if you wish

Call to worship

Today we come looking for the Christ Child.

All: We come, bringing our hurts, our worries, our fears.

We come seeking relief from pain. With the psalmist of old we say,

"O Lord, you are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.

Give heed to my cry, for I am brought very low."

Welcome – Pastor White

Blue Christmas is peaceful, contemplative service that provides space for those who are grieving a loss in their lives (whether a person, a job, an experience, a dream) to engage the deep truths of Advent and Christmas without feeling forced into experiences of cheer that they are not feeling. Many churches celebrate this service on the longest day of the year. Our hope is that our time together this evening will be meaningful for you. (Pause)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

All things were made by God, and without God nothing came to be. What came to be through God was life, and this life was the light of the world.

The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Prayer - For Those Who Mourn

Gracious God, as your Son wept with Mary and Martha at the tomb of Lazarus, look with compassion on those who grieve. Grant them the assurance

of your presence now and faith in your eternal goodness, that in them may be fulfilled the promise that those who mourn shall be comforted; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Song – Scars in Heaven - Casting Crown
Sing along if you wish

A reading - Psalm 22 (*All read the boldface verses together.*)

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from helping me, so far from the words of my groaning?

**O my God, I cry by day but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.**

In you, our ancestors trusted. They trusted and you delivered them.

**It was you who brought me from the womb,
you who kept me safe on my mother's breast.**

Since my mother bore me, you have been my God.

Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

God does not despise the affliction of the afflicted.

God does not hide from me.

When I cry to God, God hears me.

Thanks be to God.

Song – In the Bleak Mid-winter
Sing along if you wish

Litany of Remembrance

The first candle is lighted.

We light this first candle to remember those whom we have loved and lost.

We pause to remember clearly, their faces, their voices, their bodies.

We embrace and give thanks for the memories that bind them to us in this season of expectation, when all Creation waits for the Light.

All: We remember them with love. May God's eternal love surround them.

A period of silent reflection.

The second candle is lighted.

We light this second candle to remember the pain of loss: loss of relationships, loss of trust, loss of jobs, loss of health, loss of faith, the loss of joy.

We acknowledge and embrace the pain of the past, O God, and we offer it to You, asking that into our wounded hearts and open hands You will place the gift of peace, shalom.

All: We remember that through You all things are possible. Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into Your future.

A period of silent reflection.

The third candle is lighted.

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, that have been heavy with our burdens. We accept and lay before you, God, the sharpness of memory, the sadness and grief, the hurt and fear, the anger and pain. We accept and lay before you the ways we feel we have fallen short, and the times we have spent blaming ourselves, and you, for all that we have suffered. We accept and lay before you the time we have walked alone, in darkness; and in knowledge of our own mortality.

All: We remember that though we have journeyed far, and that, while lost, we may have turned away from the light, the light itself has not failed. We remember that though winter be upon us and though the night be dark, with the turning of the Wheel the dawn will come, and dawn defeats the darkness.

A period of silent reflection.

The fourth candle is lighted.

We light this fourth candle to remember faith, the gift of light and hope that God offers to us in the stories of Hanukkah and of Christmas, which both also began in abandonment, insecurity, and humbleness, in a time of war and in a poor stable. We remember that the loving God who kept the light shining in the temple and who came to share this life with us promises us comfort and peace.

All: We remember the One who shares our burdens, who shows us the way to the Light, and who journeys with us into all our tomorrows.

A period of silent reflection

Special music

“Somewhere in Your Silent Night” - Pastor Cindy White

The Prayers of the People

God of wisdom, we come to you this Christmas Season tired, in turmoil, and in pain. As the nights have grown longer, so has darkness grown and wrapped itself around our hearts. In this season of longest night, we ask your healing blessings upon all that we carry in our hearts -- sorrow we fear may never end, wounds we cannot even put into words. Lord, hear our prayer,

All: And in Your merciful love, answer.

God of mercy and compassion, there are those among us who are grieving over what might have been. Death or loss or terrible hurt has changed our experience of Christmas. We remember that once it was a special day for us, too, but someone or something precious has gone away from us in this life. We have lost a beloved, a job, a goal, a cause, a dream. We find ourselves adrift and alone. We are weary from the journey, and we have found no room at the inn. We come to you seeking rest, and peace, and shelter from the storm. Lord, hear our prayer.

All: And in Your merciful love, answer.

God of grace, in the spirit of the season, grant us all that we need to comfort us as we journey through this Christmas season. We ask that you shelter and sustain all those of us, both here and throughout the world, who wander or want or weep or are heavy laden, that we may be lifted up in courage and journey on in Thy peace. Lord, hear our prayer.

All: And in Your merciful love, answer.

God of love, in this Christmas Season we embrace and offer up to you all that used to be which is now lost to us, and cannot be again. With celebration all around us, memories of what was, and fears of what may be, weigh heavy on our hearts. Please hold us close in your embrace, be near to us this night, until the light returns and morning comes.

Lord, hear our prayer,

All: And in Your merciful love, answer.

Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give thine angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for thy love's sake. Amen.

Individual candle lighting – “The Middle of My Storm” – The Clark Family
Members of congregation bring candles to front and light them and return to their seats. Candles may remain lit until end of service.

Reading – Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd;

I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;

he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul;

he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his Name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil; for thou art with me;

thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies;

thou annointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,

and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Song: Silent Night – Please sing along

Benediction

Thank you for being with us this evening

May the power and the mystery go before us, to show us the way, shine above us to lighten our world, lie beneath us to bear us up, walk with us and give us companionship, and glow and flow within us to bring us joy. The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace, both now and forever more. Amen.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.