

Blue Christmas

The Longest Night:

A Blue Christmas Service

We greet you in the name of our Christ and offer you His love and embrace. Today we gather for a Blue Christmas Service; 'blue' as in the blues, or "I am feeling blue." We recognize that not everyone is emotionally up and cheery for the Christmas holidays. Dealing with the pandemic, the fear, the loss of normal social interactions, as well as perhaps the death of a loved one, facing life after divorce or separation, coping with the loss of a job, living with cancer, or some other disease that puts a question mark over the future, and a number of other human situations make parties and joviality painful for many people in our parishes and communities.

There is a growing attentiveness to the needs of people who are feeling blue, or a little down, at Christmastime. Increasing numbers of churches are creating sacred space for people living through dark times. Such services are reflective, accepting where we really are, and holding out healing and hope. And that is why Saint Miriam is holding this *The Longest Night Service*, taking place near the actual Winter Solstice, the longest day of the year, with the year's least amount of daylight. *Symbols not to be lost or overlooked.*

There is also an interesting convergence for this day as we combine today's service with a traditional Mass on a Sunday. This linkage invites making some connections between our own struggle to believe the tale of Jesus' resurrection, the long nights just before Christmas, and the struggle with darkness and grief faced by those living with loss and the reality that today, in the Sacrifice of the Mass, God comes and is made manifest and real. His Presence is felt in new ways today to remind us that we are loved and safe.

This service will be a time of prayer, simple poems, embracing music selections, and reflection. We also offer the Anointing of the Sick and/or blessing prayers to all who attend, if desired. On this holy day, we remember all for whom the holidays are not joyful as this is a service of wholeness and healing in mid-December, perhaps better explained this way:

"Comfort, comfort my people, says God"

Welcome to Saint Miriam...

Monsignor Jim, Pastor



Service Liturgy

The Sanctuary, with the Advent Wreath present, is used for this service. Votive candles are placed on floor stands and those gathered may light the Burning Bush with a small taper or long wick. The Sanctuary is intentionally dimly lit with candles, Christmas Tree, Votives, and Altar Candles being the predominate source of light. The ministers enter in silence, before the special prelude hymn, to join the gathered in solidarity as one. Before worship begins, instrumental music played capably and gently creates an inviting atmosphere in which congregants can enter—spiritually and emotionally—at their own pace.

Prelude Music: The Lark Ascending, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Composer

Gathering Hymn: After the Storm, Mumford & Sons, Sigh No More

Lyrics: “After The Storm”

And after the storm,
I run and run as the rains come
And I look up, I look up,
on my knees and out of luck,
I look up.

Night has always pushed up day
You must know life to see decay
But I won't rot, I won't rot
Not this mind and not this heart,
I won't rot.

And I took you by the hand
And we stood tall,
And remembered our own land,
What we lived for.

And there will come a time, you'll see, with no more tears.
And love will not break your heart, but dismiss your fears.
Get over your hill and see what you find there,
With grace in your heart and flowers in your hair.

And now I cling to what I knew
I saw exactly what was true
But oh no more.
That's why I hold,
That's why I hold with all I have.
That's why I hold.

And I won't die alone and be left there.
Well I guess I'll just go home,
Oh God knows where.
Because death is just so full and man so small.
Well I'm scared of what's behind and what's before.

And there will come a time, you'll see, with no more tears.
And love will not break your heart, but dismiss your fears.
Get over your hill and see what you find there,
With grace in your heart and flowers in your hair.

And there will come a time, you'll see, with no more tears.
And love will not break your heart, but dismiss your fears.
Get over your hill and see what you find there,
With grace in your heart and flowers in your hair.

Opening Invocation & Prayer

Priest: In the Name of the Father, and of the  Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Priest: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

All: And also with you.

Priest: All around us, lights are lit and carols play.

All: The season heaps joy upon us.

Priest: Yet, we who come here, we carry more than joy;

All: We carry loss, worry, grief and pain.

Priest: We come weary, seeking rest from expectations.

All: We also seek a holy presence to be with us.

Priest: We come to this place, by the resilient grace of God:

All: Love that never lets go.

Opening Prayer

Adapted from Godspacelighting while the author was grieving the still raw death of her mother,

A Blue Christmas Poem

On this long dark night we await the coming of Christ.

We long for the light of his presence,

With us and in us.

When our souls are deeply troubled,

and our hearts break with the weight of sorrow,

may our grief be seasoned with love,

and our sorrow be buoyed by hope.

In our times of God-forsakenness and estrangement,

May we gaze on the innocent One,

made perfect through suffering.

and see in him our vulnerable God,

who saves in weakness and pain.

May our suffering empty us of pride,

and lead us to true joy

our only security,

in Christ the infinite depths of God's grace.

Priest: God of love and understanding, we gather here this evening to confront our pain in the midst of the world's celebration. Help us to know that you are present with us in all of our moods and feelings and seasons. Grant us a taste of the hope, peace, joy and love that you promise to all of your people through the gift of your Son, Jesus.

All: Amen.

Psalm 88 - Sung

Antiphon



Day and night I cry to you, my God.

Text: *Liturgy of the Hours*, © 1974, ICEL
Music: Suzanne Toolan, SM, © 1986, GIA Publications, Inc.

² O **LORD** and **God** of my salvation,
I **cry** before you day and **night**.

³ Let my **prayer** come into your
presence.
Incline your ear to my **cry**.

⁴ For my **soul** is **filled** with evils;
my **life** is on the **brink** of the **grave**.

⁵ I am **reckoned** as **one** in the **tomb**;
I am like a **warrior** without **strength**,

⁶ like one **roaming** among the **dead**,
like the **slain** lying in their **graves**,
like **those** you remember no **more**,
cut **off**, as they **are**, from your **hand**.

⁷ You have **laid** me in the **depths** of
the **pit**,
in **regions** that are **dark** and **deep**.

⁸ Your **anger** **weighs** down upon me;
I am **drowned** beneath your **waves**.

⁹ You have **taken** away my **friends**;
to **them** you have **made** me **hateful**.
Imprisoned, I **cannot** escape;

⁰ my **eyes** are **sunken** with **grief**.

I **call** to you, **LORD**, all day **long**;
to **you** I **stretch** out my **hands**.

¹ Will you **work** your **wonders** for the
dead?

Will the **shades** rise up to **praise** you?

¹² Will your **mercy** be **told** in the **grave**,
or your **faithfulness** in the **place** of
perdition?

¹³ Will your **wonders** be **known** in the **dark**,
your **justice** in the **land** of **oblivion**?

¹⁴ But **I**, O **LORD**, **cry** out to **you**;
in the **morning** my **prayer** comes before
you.

¹⁵ **Why** do you **reject** me, O **LORD**?
Why do you **hide** your **face** from me?

¹⁶ I am **wretched**, close to **death** from my
youth.

I have **borne** your **trials**; I am **numb**.
¹⁷ Your **fury** has **swept** down upon me;
your **terrors** have **utterly** **destroyed** me.

¹⁸ They **surround** me all the **day** like a **flood**;
together they **close** in **against** me.

¹⁹ Friend and **neighbor** you have **taken** away:
my **one** companion is **darkness**.

Give **praise** to the **Father** **Almighty**,
to his **Son**, Jesus **Christ** the **Lord**,
to the **Spirit** who **dwells** in our **hearts**,
both **now** and forever. **Amen**.

Prayer of Approach on a Dark Night

Leader: We gather this night, to remember...
those who have touched our lives,
glad memories and happy stories,
and love that we hold dear.

All: We name those who have been life itself to us.

Leader: We gather in the name of Jesus,
vulnerable as an infant,
joyful and happy as a youth,
wise and caring as an adult.

All: We gather in the presence of God, who brings life and light to all.

Leader: All life is precious in God's sight.

All: No one is ever alone or forgotten.

Leader: Come, let us gather in the Spirit of hope and peace.

All: We worship, in the name of joy and love. Amen.

Scripture:

Listening for God's Promise

This is an opportunity to sit, listen and reflect, even as we wish to be somewhere else in our loss. What follows is an option to do - to become - something different. In each of three sections—Loss, Healing, and Hope—a passage of scripture speaks to a theme of God. Following the scripture, a prayer is offered that elaborates on scripture and connects it with our lives. At the end of each section, one verse of the hymn “Those Hearts That We Have Treasured” reinforces the theme and offers a lilting melody to join in singing, or to simply reflect.

Reading One: Losing One We Love - Isaiah 40:1, 6–8

Prayer

Leader: Holy One, you are with us in times of trouble and in times of peace;
in times of sorrow and times of joy.
When we are unsure of how to continue living and loving,
your Spirit intervenes with sighs too deep for words.
Speak for us now, Loving God.
Comfort us with your abiding peace... (Silence)

Verse: Those Hearts That We Have Treasured (VU 494, v. 1)

Silent Reflection

Reading Two: Healing and Memory - Psalm 139:7–12

Prayer

Leader: God of all, when we feel alone, you draw nearer;
when we lose our footing, you guide us toward a good path.
Through the ages, you have promised to be a comfort to your people,
and you call us to be a comfort to others.
In all our living, may we never lose the memory
of our most cherished relationships,
and may we feel the courage and strength you offer to us
through those who surround us... (Silence)

Verse: Those Hearts That We Have Treasured (VU 494, v. 2)

Silent Reflection

Reading Three: Living with Hope and Love - John 14:1–4, 18–19

Prayer

Leader: God of hope and joy, you prepare our hearts for renewal.
You till the soil of our lives and nurture small shoots of possibility.
Even when we are unsure, you repeat your promise:
I will never leave you.
Open us, Holy One, to your promise.
Hold us in your care.
Strengthen us for your future.
Guide us in anticipation and faith... (Silence)

Verse: Those Hearts That We Have Treasured (VU 494, v. 3)

Silent Reflection

Homily

Amazing Peace by Dr Maya Angelou read by Father Bryan Wolf

The Lighting of the Christmas Tree:

Leader: We light a candle in memory of those who gave us birth, who nurtured us, offered love, and cherished us.

All: We remember mothers and fathers, guardians and grandparents, and all our family through the ages.

Leader: We light a candle in memory of those have been joined to us in the great circle of family.

All: We remember sisters and brothers, aunts, uncles, and cousins, those near to us and far away.

Leader: We light a candle in memory of those who have left us before we expected, those we hold dear, and with whom we still walk in our dreams.

All: We remember children and grandchildren, those who leaped within the womb and who danced upon the earth.

Leader: We light a candle in memory of those whom we came to know through the eyes of love. We hold sacred the faces and memories of years past, of those who brightened our days and lit up our lives.

All: We remember husbands and wives, dearest loves and closest friends, who changed our lives forever.

Leader: We light a candle in memory of those who shared in our lives in many ways, who worked with us and made our lives more enjoyable.

All: We remember friends and neighbors.

Leader: We light a candle for those we do not know, O God, who, like us, have suffered loss, who live with grief, who long for peace and justice, who long for friendship and healing.

All: We remember your people, of every time and place.

Leader: Finally, we leave one candle unlit, mindful of the great truth of this life, that in the fullness of time we, too, will join our loved ones in a realm without sorrow and pain, in the company of Unending Love.

All: For these and all your children, we give thanks for life, hope and courage. Amen.

Special Song: Scars in Heaven, Casting Crowns

Going in Peace:

The reassurance of candlelight is enhanced by a darkened sanctuary. An acoustic guitar and solo voice to lead the singing would be helpful and pleasant. The flame of the Christ candle is the source for tapers or small candles that could have been handed out at the beginning of the service.

The Sharing Christ's Light

The assembly may wish to affirm their faith by a brief sharing of peace with those around them as music plays softly.

Benediction

Priest: Let me end with this meaningful prayer by Ted Loder:

O God of all seasons and senses,
grant us the sense of your timing
to submit gracefully and rejoice quietly in the turn of the seasons.

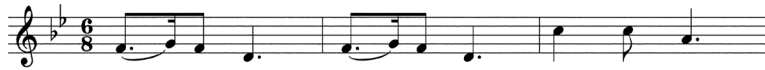
In this season of short days and long nights,
of grey and white and cold,
teach us the lessons of endings;
children growing, friends leaving, loved ones dying,
grieving over,
grudges over,
blaming over,
excuses over.

O God, grant us a sense of your timing.
In this season of short days and long nights,
of grey and white and cold,
teach us the lessons of beginnings;
that such waitings and endings may be the starting place,
a planting of seeds which bring to birth what is ready to be born—
something right and just and different,
a new song, a deeper relationship, a fuller love—
in the fullness of your time.

O God, grant us the sense of your timing.

Closing Carol: Silent Night

Silent Night



1. Si - lent night, ho - ly night, All is calm,
2. Si - lent night, ho - ly night, Shep - herds quake
3. Si - lent night, ho - ly night, Son of God,



all is bright Round yon Vir - gin Moth - er and Child,
at the sight; Glo - ries stream from heav - en a - far,
love's pure light Ra - diant beams from thy ho - ly face,



Ho - ly In - fant so ten - der and mild, Sleep in heav - en - ly
Heav'n - ly hosts sing al - le - lu - ia; Christ, the Sav - ior, is
With the dawn of re - deem - ing grace, Je - sus, Lord, at thy



peace, Sleep in heav - en - ly peace.
born! Christ, the Sav - ior, is born!
birth, Je - sus, Lord, at thy birth.

Those Hearts we have treasured

Those hearts that we have treasured,
those lives that we have shared,
those loves that walked besides us,
those friends for whom we've cared –
their blessing rests upon us,
their life is memory,
their suffering is over,
their spirits are set free.

From hearts that we have treasured,
from lives that we have shared,
from loves that walked beside us,
from friends for whom we've cared –
we've learned to treasure kindness,
we've learned that grace provides,
we've learned to be together,
we've learned that love abides.

They still give hope and comfort,
they did not lose the fight,
they showed us truth and goodness,
they shine into our night.

Remember days of gladness;
remember times of joy;
remember all the moments
that grief cannot destroy.

Text: Sylvia G. Dunstan, 1955-1993
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