

A BLUE CHRISTMAS SERVICE

By RAY BEAVER

The Gathering

Words of Welcome

1) The Approach

Call to Worship (from Isaiah 9)

“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. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, you have broken in pieces, O God, or renewer.”

Opening Prayer

God of Mercy, hear us as we pray in this Advent Season for ourselves, for our families, and for all who live with the painful memories of loss. We ask for strength in this day, courage for tomorrow and peace with the past. We ask these things in the name of Christ who shares our life in joy and sorrow; through the death and new birth, despair and promise. Amen.

2) First Lesson: Isaiah 40

Our first scripture reading comes from the Book of Isaiah. It was written in a time when many of the people of Judah had been taken as captives into exile in Babylon, and were feeling crushed and without hope.

Isaiah 40:1-2, 12, 27-31

“Comfort, O comfort my people.” Says your God. “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.”

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?

Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God?” Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk

and not faint.

3) **Responsive Psalm 121**

One: I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come?

Many: **My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.**

One: He will not let your foot to be moved. The one who keeps you will not slumber.

Many: **He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.**

One: The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.

Many: **The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.**

One: The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.

Many: **The Lord shall preserve your going out and our coming in from this time on and forevermore.**

4) **Second Lesson: Matthew 1 and 2**

The story of the first Christmas is not really a happy story but a story about life in the real world. Mary of Nazareth, who is engaged to the carpenter Joseph, discovers she is pregnant. Joseph does not want to embarrass Mary and plans to break the engagement privately. This was not an easy time for this couple. Their country was under Roman occupation and King Herod who ruled Palestine for the Romans was known for his cruelty. These are not exactly ideal conditions for bringing a child into the world. In the midst of their turmoil, an angel—God’s messenger—speaks to Joseph in a dream and tells him to proceed with his marriage to Mary.

A reading from Matthew chapter 1:18-24

In the midst of Mary and Joseph’s joy over the safe birth of their son Jesus, a new crisis looms. King Herod orders the death of all children under 2 and so the Holy Family has to flee as refugees to Egypt. There they live for several years until King Herod dies and it is safe to return. Mary and Joseph felt God’s presence with them through all the hardships they had to ace.

A reading from Matthew chapter 2:7-23

Music: “*O Come Let Us Adore Him*” (printed on separate sheet)

5) **Gospel Lesson: John 1**

Matthew and Luke describe Jesus' birth in Bethlehem with stories of visits from shepherds and Magi. But John's gospel speaks of Jesus as God's Word for all humanity, as God's Word spoken through this one born into a hurting world. He also describes Jesus' birth as light in out of darkness.

(John 1:1-14) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and glory. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has never overpowered it. The true light that enlightens all people was coming into the world. And the word was made flesh and lived among us; and we saw his glory, full of grace and truth."

6) **Message:**

A very short reflection and affirmation, preferably in story-telling mode, possibly using some poetry such as "The Christmas Spirit" and "Into This Silent Night" by Ann Weems from *Kneeling in Bethlehem*.

Music #633 – "Hark a Herald Voice is Sounding"

Responding to God's Word

7) **A Liturgy of Remembering with the candles of the Advent Wreath.**

One: This first candle we light to remember those whom we have loved and lost.

We pause to remember. *(Pause while the first candle is lit by _____)* We remember their name, their face, their voice, the memories that bind them to us in this season.

All: May God's eternal love surround them.

One: This second candle we light is to redeem the pain of loss; the loss of jobs, the loss of relationships, the loss of health. We pause to gather. *(Pause while the second candle is lit by _____)* We gather up the pain of the past and offer it to God, asking that from God's hands we receive the gift of peace.

All: Refresh, restore, renew us O God, and lead us into your future.

One: This third candle we light is to remember ourselves this Christmas time. We pause to give thanks. (*Pause while the third candle is lit by _____*) We give thanks and remember these past weeks and months; the disbelief, the anger, the down times, the poignancy of reminiscing, the hugs and handshakes of family and friends, all those who stood with us. We give thanks for all the support we have known.

All: let us remember that dawn defeats darkness.

One: This fourth candle is lit to give light to our faith and the gift of hope which the Christmas story offers to us. We pause and remember. (*Pause while the fourth candle is lit by _____*) We remember that God who shares our life promises us a place and time of no more pain and suffering.

All: Let us remember the one who shows the way, who brings the truth and who bears the light.

One: As you light a candle, please drop into the bowl provided the slip with the name of the one you are remembering, and your own name also, and these names will be read in the Prayers of the Church during the Sundays of Christmas in the churches of our community. Let all who wish to light a candle to remember a loved one, to remember a loss, to remember a relationship, come forward now to do so. (*Silence while this is done*) These lights in their brightness are only symbols, but as they burn and finally go out, we remember that suffering passes, though memory remains forever.

All: Let us remember that though Christ has gone before us, he is ever with us.

8) Prayers of the People

One: In the spirit of this season let us now confidently ask God for all the things we need, saying in the strength of faith “God, hear our prayer”; and responding together, and in your mercy answer.

One: For ourselves as we participate in whatever way we can this Christmas. God, hear our prayer.

All: And in your mercy answer.

One: For our families and friends that they may continue to help and support us.
God, hear our prayer.

All: **And in your mercy answer.**

One: For the person we have loved that has died. For all the losses that we know, that
all may be redeemed by your Easter promise. God, hear our prayer.

All: **And in your mercy answer.**

One: For all our family and friends that they may know love and peace and happiness
in you. God, hear our prayer.

All: **And in your mercy answer.**

One: For the peace proclaimed by the angels on the first Christmas, to come
throughout the whole world. God, hear our prayer.

All: **And in your mercy answer.**

One: God of great compassion and love, listen to the prayers of us, your people.
Grant to all, especially the bereaved and troubled this Christmas, and to those
who cannot yet admit the hurt they feel, the blessing we ask in the name of
Christ who taught us to pray together, saying: Our Father, who art in heaven....

Hymn: #62—“*O Come, O Come Emmanuel*”

9) **Benediction**

One: Let us share as benediction a hope for the future.

Benediction: The Irish Blessing (in unison)

May the road rise up to meet you,

May the wind be always at your back,

May the sun shine warm upon your face,

And the rains fall soft upon your fields;

And until we meet again,

May you be held in the warmth of God’s hand. Amen.

(The one saying the benediction may wish to close with a priestly benediction, which fits
his or her own tradition.)

NOTES:

With each bulletin should be a slip of paper with this or similar wording):

_____, beloved of _____

Please feel free to use this services as is or modified to fit your situation. The services was printed on 8 ½ x 14 paper folded once, each page one column, and it fit well in Times New Roman 12 point text.

The hymn numbers noted were from the hymnal we had at the site of the service, but the hymns should be readily identifiable. Next time we will print out all the words to the hymns, as one of the congregations has the copyright arrangements.

The parts marked “Many” or “All” were printed in bold, and are to be said by all present.

In our usage, the “Words of Welcome” was to be from the president of the Clergy Council, and sections 1 and 8 were to be the host pastor.

If you are using the candle-lighting part, be sure to have more candles than you think you will need—this service was first celebrated in a Roman Catholic chapel and plenty were available.