

THE BLUE CHRISTMAS SERVICE SCRIPT THE LONGEST NIGHT

The Welcome and Sharing of Community Concerns.

We extend to you a warm welcome on this cold and longest night of the year. We hope and pray that you will be blessed by your presence here as you remember those you love and acknowledge the pain and sorrow of these days. My prayer for all of you is that the light of our Savior Jesus Christ might shine through our darkness and grant you everlasting comfort and peace. Before we share in our prayer of preparation, I would invite you to offer your prayer requests for persons you know of who are in special need this day.

The Prayer of Preparation

God of compassion and love, we give you thanks and praise for the opportunity to share our sorrow and pain at a time when many are laughing and filled with great joy. The holidays are difficult for us as we remember the loss of those we have loved. May this time in your presence grant us comfort and peace as we acknowledge our feelings and rest in the eternal hope you offer through Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

The Bearing of the Light

The Prelude

The Call to Worship (from Isaiah 9)

L: The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; on those who lived in a land of deep shadow a light has shone.

R: For the yoke that was weighing upon them, and the burden upon their shoulders, God has broken in pieces.

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

R: And the Word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth, and we have seen his glory.

L: In him was life, and that life was the light of all.

R: The light shines on in the darkness, and the darkness has never, never been able to put it out.

The Hymn of Praise

“O Come O Come Immanuel”

#100

The Invocation and the Lord's Prayer (debts)

L: God of Mercy, hear our prayer in this Advent Season, for ourselves and our families who live with the painful memories of loss. We ask for strength for today, courage for tomorrow and peace for the past. We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ who shares our life in joy and sorrow, death and new birth, despair and promise; who taught us to pray together saying: **"Our Father...."**

The First Scripture Reading

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. "Comfort, comfort my people," says our God. "Encourage the people of Jerusalem and tell them that their time of suffering is ended. With whom will you compare me? Who is my equal?" asks the Holy One. "Look up to the heavens! Who made the stars, if not the One who leads them out like an army, calling each one by its own name? So mighty is God's power and strength that not one fails to answer. Israel, why then do you complain that our God does not know your troubles or care if you suffer injustice? Our God, the everlasting God, the creator of the farthest parts of the earth, never grows tired or weary. No one can fathom the depths of God's understanding. God gives power to the faint and strength to the powerless. Even youths become exhausted and young ones give up, but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles they shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint."

The Musical Response Solo

"On Eagles Wings"

(In Chalice Hymnal)

The Litany of Hope (Psalm 121) *READ FROM BULLETIN*

L: I will lift up mine eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?

C: My help comes from God who made heaven and earth.

L: God who keeps you will not slumber, nor suffer your foot to be moved.

R: Behold the Holy One who keeps Israel shall not slumber or sleep.

L: The Almighty is your keeper and the shade on your right hand.

R: The sun shall not hurt you by day or the moon by night.

L: The Creator shall preserve you from all evil and shall preserve your soul.

R: Thanks be to God who preserves our going out and our coming in from this time forth and even for evermore.

The Second Scripture Reading

Selections Matthew, chapters 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 brining 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 I marriage to Marry. (Matthew 1:18-24) Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, God is with us.” When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her for his wife.

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 have 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 face. (Matthew 2:7-23) Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, when the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.” When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. Then was

fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: “A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more. When Herod died, and angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.” Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, “He will be called a Nazorean.”

The Musical Response Solo

“You’ll Never Walk Alone”

The Third Scripture Reading

John 1:1-14

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. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, full of grace and truth.

The Meditation

“A Mustard Seed Christmas”

Pastor Pam

By Charlene Elizabeth Fairchild of Kir-Shalom

“What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.” Luke 13:18-19 NRSV

Last year our first Christmas decoration was a mustard seed. A lowly mustard seed.

Taped on a sheet of white paper to the center of our mantelpiece. It was a sign and a symbol of the fragile and tiny hope I had of celebrating Christmas. The hope was fragile and it was tiny because I did not “feel” like Christmas last year. How could I sing the Lord’s song in the strange land of Grief? I was the first Sunday in Advent and my husband and I were having our usual leisurely coffee brunch after all the duties of the morning and the noon hour. Two church services and the important weekly phone calls to my father and other family members were behind us for another week. My husband, rather gingerly, brought up the subject of Christmas knowing that I was immersed in the full bloom of grief. Mom had died on Labor Day and this was the first Christmas to be marked without her. I did not “feel” like Christmas. Despite my fog of misery, I knew that I was being somewhat self-absorbed in my pain. Life was going on about me but, for the life of me, I couldn’t figure out how I was going to get through this time. Everybody was busy and happy and having parties and family gatherings. I shrank inside. The thought of smiling and pretending joy was beyond pain for me. What was I going to do?

I remembered the reading from Romans that morning. The night is far gone, the day is near.... Let us put on the armor of light.... Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” The season celebrating His birth and looking for His coming again was upon me and I was being called to participate. But it was beyond me to rejoice. As I said these things to my husband, he reminded me that God IS able even if I was not. He mentioned the parable of the mustard seed to me. God could take that little mustard seed and make of it something worthy. God could take that tiny seed of faith and grow it into a kingdom of hope.

I felt as if I had been touched. I got up and went into the kitchen and rifled through my spices! Yes! There it was. My bottle of mustard seeds. I got one out and grabbed a piece of paper from the pad by our phone and taped that mustard seed to the center. I returned to the dining room, waving the paper triumphantly, “I’ve got it! I’ve got it! I CAN celebrate this year.” My husband said, “Here, let’s put it up on the mantel. It’ll be our first Christmas decoration.” Up it went. Every time I looked at it, I was reminded of the hope it symbolized and the faith it embodied. I couldn’t do it on my own. But God could. And God did! The mustard seed became a powerful witness in our house last year. Many people asked about it and it became a growing joy to share what it meant. The mustard seed again graces our mantelpiece to symbolize Light in the darkness, hope in the face of grief and despair and faith in the promises of God. My prayer is that, in the midst of difficult times, you will find hope that a mustard seed Christmas may be yours.

The Responsive Music

“The Impossible Dream”

The Litany of Remembering and Lighting of the Advent Candles

READ BULLETIN, LIGHT CANDLES IN BETWEEN SECTIONS

L: This first candle we light is to remember those whom we have loved and lost. We pause to

remember their name, their face, their voice, the memory that binds them to us in this season.

R: May God's eternal love surround them. *(The first candle is lit during a moment of silence.)*

L: This second candle we light is to redeem the pain of our loss; the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, the loss of health. We pause to gather up the pain of the past and offer it to God, asking that from God's hands we receive the gift of peace.

R: Refresh, restore, renew us O God, and lead us into your future. As we grasp your hands and receive the embrace of your peace. *(The second candle is lit during a moment of silence.)*

L: This third candle we light is to remember ourselves this Christmas time. We pause 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 and give thanks for all the support we have known.

R: Let us remember that down defeats the darkness. *(The third candle is lit during a moment of silence.)*

L: This fourth candle is lit to remember our faith and the gift of hope, which the Christmas story offers to us. Here we remember that God who shares our life promises us a place and time where there will be no more pain and suffering.

R: Let us remember our Savior Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, who bears the light and shows us the way, unveiling the truths of eternal life. *(The fourth candle is lit during a moment of silence.)*

The Prayers of the People

READ FROM BULLETIN

L: In the spirit of this season let us now confidently ask God for all the things we need; For ourselves as we participate in whatever way we can this Christmas. God hear our prayer.

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

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

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

L: 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.

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

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

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

L: For the peace proclaimed by the Christmas angels to come throughout the whole world. God hear our prayer.

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

L: God of great compassion and love. Listen to the prayers of these, your people. Grant to all especially the bereaved and troubled ones this Christmas, the blessing we ask in the name of Christ.

R: Amen.

The Closing Hymn

Silent Night

The Bearing of the Light

The Benediction

The Postlude

Credits

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