



Blue Christmas

Thursday, December 21, 2023

(the longest night of the year)

5:00 p.m.



**Presbyterian
Community Church
of the Rockies**

1700 Brodie Avenue, Estes Park, Colorado 80517

People: The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in, from this time forth for ever more.

Leader: Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

People: As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

A Reading from the Gospel of Matthew (11:28-30)

Leader: The Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

***Hymn: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"**

*O come, thou Rod of Jesse, free
thine own from Satan's tyranny;
from depths of hell thy people save,
and give them victory over the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

Lighting of Four Advent Candles

First Candle:

Leader: The first candle we light to remember those persons whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember their name, their voice, their face, the memory that binds them to us in this season. We hold them before God, giving thanks for their lives in ours.

Please take a moment to remember those who have died. I invite you to name them, aloud or in the silence of your hearts... *(the first candle is lit)*

Leader: Lord, each of us takes our loved one by the hand and leads them to you, the God of love. Here we present them to you.

People: Accept our love and thanksgiving as we entrust them to your loving care. We want our loved ones to be free at home with you. We ask that you save a place for us beside them. We ask that you fill us with motivation and energy in the days ahead when we feel like giving up; remind us often of our true homeland when we are caught up in the desolation of the journey. Help us to find joy in the people, events, and the beauty of nature which surrounds us.

Thank you for the gift each of these people has been in our lives. We want to believe that we will celebrate the treasure of love with them again, when we are all in your presence forever. May this truth sustain us in the days to come. Take our sad and aching hearts and comfort us. Comfort us, for we only feel hollowness and emptiness. God of sorrowing, draw near! Amen.

***Hymn:** *“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”*

*O Come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer
our spirits by thine advent here;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death’s dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

Second Candle:

Leader: The second candle we light is to redeem the pain of loss; the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs with the security they bring, the loss of health in ourselves or in family members, the loss of joy and peace in our lives from the stresses which surround us, the loss and loneliness we experience when our loved ones do not share our faith. As we gather up the pain of the past we offer it to you, O God, asking that into our open hands you will place the gift of peace.

Please take a moment to remember the losses. I invite you to name them, aloud or in the silence of your hearts..... *(the second candle is lit)*

People: God of mystery, we turn our hearts to you. We come before you in need of peace, grateful for the mystery of life and ever keenly aware of your promises of guidance and protection. We want to place our trust in you, but our hearts grow fearful and anxious. We forget so easily that you will be with us in all that we experience. Teach us to be patient with the transformation of our lives and to be open to the changes which we are now going through. Amen.

***Hymn:** *“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”*

*O come, thou Key of David, come,
and open wide our heavenly home;
make safe the way that leads on high,
and close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

Third Candle:

Leader: The third candle we light for those who experience a loss of direction in their lives. *(the third candle is lit)*

God of the Exodus, you led Moses and your people through the wilderness to a new land. Hear our prayer. We want so much to have a sense of direction, to know where we are and where we ought to be headed. But the

darkness and the questions stay. You ask us to be full of faith, to believe deep within that you are our signpost, that you are our wisdom and our guide, and to trust in your presence. Your words to us are clear: "Do not fear, I go before you."

People: God of our depths, we cry out to you to be our guide. Help us to have a strong sense of inner direction and grant that we may have the reassurance of knowing that we are on the right path. Take our lives and use them according to your will. Take all that is lost in us and bring it home with you. Amen.

***Hymn: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"**

*O come, O come, great Lord of might,
who to thy tribes on Sinai's height
in ancient times once gave the law
in cloud and majesty and awe.*

Rejoice! Rejoice!

Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

Fourth Candle:

Leader: The fourth candle we light as a sign of hope, the hope that the Christmas story offers to us. We remember that God, who shares our life, promises us a place and time of no more pain and suffering.

(the fourth candle is lit)

People: O God whose spirit is known by those whose hearts are thankful, and who makes cheerfulness a companion of strength, lift up our hearts, we pray, to a joyous confidence in your care. Guide us when we cannot see the way. Teach us to know that a shadow is only a shadow, because the light of eternal goodness shines behind the object of our fears. Where there is love in life, teach us to find it; help us to trust it and enable us to grow in the power of love. So may our lives bring comfort and encouragement to others. We ask it, in the name of Jesus Christ whose life is our light. Amen.

***Hymn: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"**

*O come, thou Root of Jesse's tree,
an ensign of thy people be;
before thee rulers silent fall;
all peoples on thy mercy call.*

Rejoice! Rejoice!

Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

Prayers of the People

Leader: In the spirit of this season let us now confidently ask our God for all the good things we need: For ourselves as we participate in this Christmas as special people coping with our many different losses. God, hear our prayer.

People: And in your mercy, answer.

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

People: And in your mercy, answer.

Leader: For any person we have loved who has died, for all the losses we know in our lives, that all may be redeemed by your Easter promise. God, hear our prayer.

People: And in your mercy, answer.

Leader: For our family and friends, that you may bless them with love, peace, and joy. God, hear our prayer.

People: And in your mercy, answer.

Leader: For peace throughout the world as proclaimed by the Christmas Angels on that faraway hillside. God, hear our prayer.

People: And in your mercy, answer.

Leader: For greater understanding of the lessons of love and acceptance as taught by Jesus your Christ. God, hear our prayer.

People: And in your mercy, answer.

Leader: 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 Jesus, who taught us to pray.

People: 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 debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever.

Lighting of Individual Candles *"Twas in the Moon of Wintertime"*
Huron Carol Setting by John Carter

Leader: Each of us comes bearing our own hurts, sorrows, broken places. I want to invite each of you to offer your personal wound to the God who loves each of us deeply and wants to carry our pain. God waits patiently, gently calling out: "Give me your pain, come to me...all who labor and are heavy laden, I will refresh you!"

Leader: 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.

CLOSING

As we gather this evening, we embrace and claim the darkness that is present both in the world and in our own lives. As people who are familiar with the darkness, we also know that we gather to be illumined by the light of the Christ Child this Christmas season. May the Christ Child, born in a lowly stable, himself an outcast and marginal, bring light, comfort, peace, and joy this holiday season.

***Hymn:** *“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”*

*O come, Desire of nations, bind
in one the hearts of all mankind;
bid thou our sad divisions cease,
and be thyself our King of Peace.*

Rejoice! Rejoice!

Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel

*O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.*

Rejoice! Rejoice!

Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel

Leader: May the hope of the Christ Child sustain us through this darkness.

People: That together we may shine again. Amen.

Postlude *“Appalachian Christmas Carol”* John Ness Beck

“When Heaven Meets Earth” Jason Tonioli

*Note: The hymn *“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”* is a song of people in darkness longing for God’s light. It is not calling us to rejoice in the worldly form of the word, but calling our spirits and souls to reflect the true hope and joy that only God can give.

**The liturgy was written by Rev. Heather Hill of Parma, Ohio.

*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.*

Christine Sine

