



Blue Christmas Longest Night Service

Thursday December 21st 7:00P.M.

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*Blue Christmas – 21 December 2017 7:00pm
Condon United Church of Christ*

Welcome and Announcements

Welcome to this Blue Christmas service. As we gather here on this longest night of the year, we know ourselves welcomed into the protective shelter of God's healing love. We are free to pour out our grief, release our anger, face our emptiness, feel our hurt, and know that God cares. We are safe here, to acknowledge all the darkness in our lives, and to trust that the light will return. We are called both to acknowledge our own brokenness, and to be witnesses to one another of shared compassion and caring.

In this service we'll be praying, singing, lighting candles, and, if you so choose, offering words about your own sadness and pain. We'll also have a little time for quiet reflection—time to just feel whatever it is you are feeling in the presence of God's love. I pray that you will find hope and comfort in knowing that you are not alone.

Bell Calling us to Silence

Call to Worship

One Tonight we gather here in this place of refuge,

All For we are lost and lonely,
angry, afraid, grieving and sad.

One On this longest night of the year we gather, daring to wonder if God has indeed come in Jesus—discerning the rejection we have known, intimate with our failed relationships, holding our heartache in hands of tenderness. Tonight we gather with neighbors and strangers, a family made one by our brokenness.

All Tonight we gather just as we are, for God has promised to meet us here and to welcome us—who we are, as we are.

Song: O little town of Bethlehem
how still we see thee lie,
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep,
the silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
the everlasting light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
are met in thee tonight.

Opening Prayer

God of mercy, you have promised to go before us: into our brokenness, into hospital rooms, into empty houses, into graveyards, into our future. Hear our prayers for ourselves, our families, our friends, all who live with loss, regret, and heart-rending sorrow. We ask for strength for today, peace for the past, and courage for tomorrow. We ask these things in the name of Jesus the Christ, through whose life we know you share our joy and sorrow, death and new birth, despair and promise. Amen.

Reading Psalm 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?

But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;

my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.

Light of Christ

The symbol reminds us that, even when we are shrouded in darkness, in our personal life or in the life of humanity, Christ's love is a fire that never dies out.

Song: 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.

Community Offering of Grief, Loss, Cares, and Caring

As we light our candles:

We remember those we have loved and lost. We pause to remember their names, their faces, their voices, their smells. We give thanks for the memory that binds them to us this season.

We remember the pain of endings: the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, the loss of health, the loss of innocent lives. 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.

We remember ourselves in this Christmas season. We remember the past weeks, months, perhaps years of down times. We remember the poignancy of memories, the grief, the sadness, the pain of our lives.

We remember our faith and the gift of hope that God offers to us in the Christmas story. We remember that God who shares our life does not inflict pain and suffering but suffers with us and is with us in our healing.

At this time, I invite any who choose to come forward, light a candle and, if you wish, offer to this gathered community: a name of a loved one gone now, a few words about a loss or trouble you are facing, perhaps words of hope that have helped sustain you, whatever you may feel called to offer here, before these people and before God's altar.

Silence

Often God's voice comes in a whisper, in a breath of silence. To remain in silence in God's presence, open to the Spirit, is already prayer.

Song: O come, O Day-spring, come and cheer
our spirits by your advent here;
Love stir within the womb of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
shall come to thee O Israel.

Prayer

All around us are the sights and sounds of Christmas, Gentle God: Christmas lights on homes and businesses, the laughter of parties, the music in every store. But deep within us we carry our pain; our grief walks with us every step we take; loneliness is a shawl we drape over our shoulders on empty nights. So, in this time when every night stretches into eternity, we come to you, bringing our gifts: not gold, frankincense and myrrh, but grief, bitterness and loss.

In a season when so many people don't have enough hours in a day to get their lists checked off, their cards mailed, their presents wrapped, we have too much time of pain: remembering the loss that has stolen the joy of the season; grieving over a job, a dream, a loved one; sitting in the shadows of our homes, too weary to turn on the lights; wandering the streets lit by lights on all the houses, but not by the Light of the world.

Our fear of the future, our remembrance of the past, our pain that is difficult to bear and harder to release, our emptiness which cannot be filled with platitudes, our hands which cannot hold the ones we wish to embrace: all make this a season of long nights.

Be with us in our loneliness, in our longing, in our loss, in our lives. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen

Returning to the World

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. Believe the good news of the Gospel:
God's love is everlasting.
Continue now on your journey of faith
And may peace be your way in the world.

Benediction

Go now in peace, open to the grace to know God is with you always. Amen