



Advent Pause

Hoping with Intention in a Troubled World

Liturgy for Blue Christmas

LITURGY FOR THE BLUE CHRISTMAS

INTRODUCTION

Blue Christmas is a type of service that emerged in recent practice in the Northern Hemisphere. It is offered on or near the winter solstice, when the darkness of the winter season stretches to its furthest limit, and it provides a time of worship for those who struggle during the holiday season. This liturgy also goes by the names Darkest Night or Longest Night.

Blue Christmas creates a pocket dimension in the pre-Christmas season. Just as the secular world ramps up its frenetic merriment in the week before Christmas, night arrives with a liturgy that protects a window of time in which the assembly can step outside the Christmas countdown and acknowledge that we don't, and can't, always meet the mandate for holiday joy.

Liturgies like these are often designed with those who are grieving in mind, especially those who are navigating their first holiday without a beloved. But others are drawn in, too. This is also a liturgy for those who cannot go home for the holidays, for those who struggle with loneliness, for those whose brains slip toward depression in the winter season or in any other, for those for whom—for any reason—darkness and quiet and candlelight come as a bit of relief in the midst of the commercial Christmas blare.

OPENING DIALOG

In a world of shadows,
we seek illumination.

As we wait in night,
we look for sunrise.

Surrounded by fear,
we hold fast to God's promise.

We wait with hope for Christ's return
for the dawn of peace and justice.

Sometimes joy doesn't come easily.

Yet God still meets us.

Sometimes merriness is not within reach.

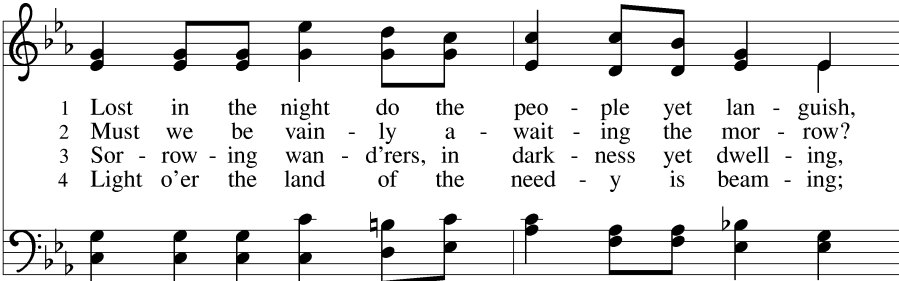
Yet God still meets us.

Sometimes despair doesn't depart at dawn.

Yet God still meets us.

Come, bring your whole selves to God.


God's arms are open wide.



1 Lost in the night do the peo - ple yet lan - guish,
 2 Must we be vain - ly a - wait - ing the mor - row?
 3 Sor - row - ing wan - d'ers, in dark - ness yet dwell - ing,
 4 Light o'er the land of the need - y is beam - ing;



long - ing for morn - ing the dark - ness to van - quish,
 Shall those who have light no light let us bor - row,
 dawned has the day of a ra - diance ex - cel - ling,
 riv - ers of life through its des - erts are stream - ing,



plain - tive - ly sigh - ing with hearts full of an - guish.
 giv - ing no heed to our bur - den of sor - row?
 death's deep - est shad - ows for - ev - er dis - pel - ling.
 bring - ing all peo - ples a Sav - ior re - deem - ing.



Will not day come soon? Will not day come soon?
 Will you help us soon? Will you help us soon?
 Christ is com - ing soon! Christ is com - ing soon!
 Come and save us soon! Come and save us soon!

Text: Nordic hymn; tr. Olav Lee, 1859-1943, alt.

Music: LOST IN THE NIGHT, Finnish folk tune

Text © 1932 Augsburg Publishing House, admin. Augsburg Fortress.

Duplication in any form prohibited without permission or valid license from copyright administrator.

LIGHTING THE FIRST CANDLE

The shadows lengthen.

The evening is here.

This is the darkest night of the year.

Let our faith flicker against our incomprehension.

The first candle is lit.

THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM

The apostle Paul wrote to the church in Rome: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” Do you not know—that death is part of the life we receive at this font? That one thing has to end so that something else can begin?

Yes, we do know: Death is tied to life. Sadness rubs shoulders with joy. Gift is tangled with loss.

“If we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him,” Paul told the church in Rome. This font delivers us into an in-between time:

a time when our sin is drowned, yet still makes ripples; a time when new life is ours, but has not yet arrived.

But as the angels said to the shepherds: do not be afraid. The waters of this small font are big enough to hold the ocean of God’s promise. They are deep enough to contain the complexity of our life with Christ. They are wide enough to wash over everything you are: sinner and saint, dreamer and mourner, entirely human and image of God. The moment of our baptism holds the eternity of God’s grace.

Amen.

LIGHTING THE SECOND CANDLE

Small stars glow above.

We ponder the signs here today.

We await news of the Savior born far away.

Stars whisper old light on a night of new love.

The second candle is lit.

PSALM 91

PRAYER

Creator of the stars of night, you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself. You are still as the North Star and steadfast as the dawn. Reveal yourself where we least expect you: in the longest night, in the most difficult times, in the sheer silence when words fail us. Faithful One, abide with us every moment.

Amen.

LIGHTING THE THIRD CANDLE

Candlelight leaps upward.

We raise our hearts to God.

The Spirit’s wings are open broad.

Hover over chaos; speak your holy Word.

The third candle is lit.

FIRST READING

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

HOMILY

LIGHTING THE FOURTH CANDLE

In quiet dimness,

heartbeats keep time.

In deepening vigil, we wait for a sign.

Jesus, end our waiting. Come into our midst.

The fourth candle is lit.

HYMN

All Earth is Hopeful

ELW 266



To - da la tie - rra es - pe - ra_al Sal - va - dor
 1 All earth is hope - ful, the Sav - ior comes at last!
 2 Peo - ple of Is - rael, you heard the proph - et tell:
 3 Moun - tains and val - leys will have to be pre - pared;
 4 We first saw Je - sus a ba - by in a crib.



y_el sur - co_a-bier - to, la ob - ra del Se - ñor; es el
 Fur - rows lie o - pen for God's cre - a - tive task: this, the
 "A vir - gin moth - er will bear Em - man - u - el"; she con -
 new high - ways o - pened, new pro - to - cols de - clared. Al - most
 This same Lord Je - sus to - day has come to live in our



mun - do que lu - cha por la li - ber - tad, re -
 la - bor of peo - ple who strug - gle to see how
 ceived him, "God with us," our broth - er, whose birth re -
 here! God is near - ing, in beau - ty and grace! All
 world; he is pres - ent, in neigh - bors we see our



cla - ma jus - ti - cia y bus - ca la ver - dad. dar - nos li - ber - tad.
 God's truth and jus - tice set ev - 'ry - bod - y free.
 stores hope and cour - age to chil - dren of this earth.
 clear ev - 'ry gate - way, in haste, come out in haste!
 Je - sus is with us, and ev - er sets us free.

PRAYERS

This prayer format encourages the assembly to offer extemporaneous petitions in response to the leader's prompts. These petitions are easily adaptable to a more familiar format in which the petitions are offered by a worship leader and the assembly concludes each one with a recurring phrase.

LORD'S PRAYER

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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

LIGHTING THE FIFTH CANDLE

Some sigh with impatience.

Others pray in relative peace.

God, you illuminate gently;

you light our way with a quiet transcendence.

The fifth candle is lit. During the singing of the hymn, everyone is invited to come and light a candle or write a note on our prayer wall.

HYMN

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

ELW 257



2 O come, O Wis - dom from on high, em - brac - ing all things
3 O come, O come, O Lord of might, as to your tribes on
4 O come, O Branch of Jes - se, free your own from Sa - tan's



far and nigh: in strength and beau - ty come and stay;
Si - nai's height in an - cient times you gave the law
tyr - an - ny; from depths of hell your peo - ple save,



teach us your will and guide our way. Re-joyce! Re-joyce!
in cloud, and maj - es - ty, and awe.
and give them vic - t'ry o'er the grave.



LIGHTING THE SIXTH CANDLE

A circle of flame grows;

so do our prayers.

We do not rush the dawn, nor do we despair.

We rest in God's warm presence as we prepare for our repose.

The sixth candle is lit.

BENEDICTION

God, whose covenant calls you to act,

Christ, whose love leads you by grace,

the Holy Spirit, whose wisdom points you toward hope,

+ bless and keep you always.

Amen.

May the spirit of our Lord be with us this night,

And with our absent brothers and sisters in Christ.

Special thanks to our GriefShare Group for assisting in the worship service tonight.

“Out of Time: Longest Night Liturgy”© 2021 by Barn Geese Worship. Used by permission of Barn Geese Worship. Hymns reprinted From Sundays and Seasons.com. Copyright 2015 Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission under Augsburg Fortress Liturgies Annual License #SAS004159

Weekly Focus Questions:

Week 1: Do Less

What can you let go of or erase from your to-do list in order to be more present with Christ this Advent?

Week 2: Experience Wonder

How can we experience wonder for God's works and be fed by wonder in the midst of this busy season?

Week 3: Hold on to Hope

How can we hold on to hope in the midst of the world's troubles?