

**Blue Christmas Service
Leader Script**

Words of Welcome

Hymn: O Little Town of Bethlehem (verses 1 & 2)

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.

For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love
O morning stars together, proclaim the holy birth
And praises sing to God the King, and peace to all on earth.

Liturgy of the Word

Scripture Reading: Selected verses from Isaiah 40 – **Jill**

"Comfort, comfort my people" says your God. "Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and call to her that the time of service is ended ... Look up to the heavens! Who made the stars, if not the One who drills them 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. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength."

Hymn – O Little Town of Bethlehem (verses 3 & 4)

How silently, how silently, the wondrous Gift is given;
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.
No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin
Where meek souls will receive him still, the dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray
Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us this day
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel.

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Responsive Scripture Reading: Psalm 22

Leader: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, so far from the words of my groaning?

People: *O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but I find no rest.*

Leader: In you, our ancestors trusted. They trusted and you delivered them.

People: It was you who took me from the womb, you who kept me safe upon my mother's breast; since my mother bore me, you have been my God.

Leader: Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

People: God does not despise the affliction of the afflicted; God does not hide from me. When I cry to God, God hears me. Thanks be to God!

A Gospel Reading: Matthew 11:28-29

Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for you souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Responsive Scripture Reading: Psalm 121

Leader: I will lift up my eyes to the hills, from where is my help to come?

People: ***My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth***

Leader: He will not let your foot be moved and he who watches over you will not fall asleep.

People: ***Behold, he who keeps watch over Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.***

Leader: The Lord himself watches over you; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.

People: ***So that the sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night***

Leader: The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; it is he who shall keep you safe.

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

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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.***

Reader 1:

God who is with us, in this season of looking forward; of anticipating the celebration of your Son's birth and return in glory; we often find ourselves uncomfortable, uneasy, worried and sad. The lights and gaiety, the music, the bright joy around us, often make us more unquiet, more out of step, feeling even more disconnected and different.

Reader 2:

Some of these feelings come from false expectations. Others come from real situations and issues that face us or those we love. Some are from events we may influence and some are beyond our control. Trusting in your grace and provision, we name these situations and face the pain and dislocation they cause us. We claim your promise to companion us in bearing them. We claim your steadfast love for us, knowing you will help us find peace for our troubled spirits. We claim your wise and merciful power, that you will meet each need as is best for us. (Silent reflection follows)

Candle Lighting

Leader

We light this first candle to remember those whom we have loved and lost.

We pause to remember clearly, their faces, their voices, their bodies.

We embrace and give thanks for the memories that bind them to us

in this season of expectation, when all Creation waits for the Light.

All: We remember them with love. May God's eternal love surround them.

Hymn: "O Come, O Come Emanuel"

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

We light this second candle to remember the pain of loss:

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loss of relationships, loss of trust, loss of jobs, loss of health, loss of faith,
the loss of joy.

We acknowledge and embrace the pain of the past, O God,
and we offer it to You,
asking that into our wounded hearts and open hands
You will place the gift of peace, shalom.

**All: We remember that through You all things are possible.
Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into Your future.**

Hymn: "O Come, O Come, Emanuel"

O come thou Wisdom from on high, who orderest all things mightily
To us the path of knowledge show, and teach us in her ways to go
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

Leader

We light this third candle to remember ourselves this Christmas time.
We pause and remember the past weeks, months, and for some of us years,
that have been heavy with our burdens. We accept and lay before you, God,
the sharpness of memory, the sadness and grief, the hurt and fear, the anger
and pain. We accept and lay before you the ways we feel we have fallen short,
and the times we have spent blaming ourselves, and you, for all that we have
suffered. We accept and lay before you the time we have walked alone, in
darkness; and in knowledge of our own mortality.

**All: We remember that though we have journeyed far, and that, while lost,
we may have turned away from the light, the light itself has not failed.
We remember that though winter be upon us and though the night be
dark,
with the turning of the Wheel the dawn will come, and dawn defeats the
darkness.**

Hymn: "O Come, O Come Emanuel"

O come thou day-spring, come and cheer our spirits by thy 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.

Leader

The fourth candle we light as a sign of hope, the hope that the Christmas story

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offers to us. We remember that God, who shares our life, promises us a place and time of no more pain and suffering.

**All: We remember the One who shares our burdens, who shows us the way to the Light,
and who journeys with us into all our tomorrows.**

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.

Lighting of Individual Candles

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!"

I invite any who would like to, to come forward and light a candle for themselves or a loved one. If you would like to say the name (or names) of the person out loud, you are welcome to do that as you light the candle. As you light the candle, remember that it is God who lights a candle in our darkness and holds us close until we are able to shine.

(individual candles are lit)

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.

Hymn: Away in a Manger

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
the little lord Jesus laid down his sweet head
The stars in the sky looked down where he lay,
the little lord Jesus asleep in the hay.

Be near me Lord Jesus, I ask thee to stay
Close by me forever and love me, I pray.

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Bless all the dear children in thy tender care
And take me to heaven to live with thee there.

Words of Benediction

Leader: As we gather this afternoon, 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, bring light, comfort, peace, and joy this holiday season.

Hymn: Silent Night

Silent night, holy night,
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon Virgin Mother and Child,
Holy Infant, so tender and mild.
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night,
Shepherds quake at the sight;
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heav'nly hosts sing alleluia;
Christ, the Savior, is born!

Silent night, holy night,
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.