

Centenary United Methodist Church

2300 W. Friendly Avenue, Greensboro, NC 27403



Blue Christmas Service

December 21, 2021

3:00 PM

Reverend Kelley Groce, Pastor - Anita Trumpler-Rich, Director of Music

Welcome to this service. Our hope for this time is to acknowledge and remember both the struggles and joys of our lives, and together to find hope and healing in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, Emmanuel.

Thank you for continuing to wear a mask to protect the most vulnerable in our midst, especially those not yet able to be vaccinated.

The Gathering of the People:

Still, Still, Still....arr. Dennis Alexander

Minister: *Welcome to this Blue Christmas Service, a time when we can, with others, acknowledge the “blue” feelings we have at Christmas time, the reasons for them, and offer them to God. Today we will experience the shortest day and the longest night of the year. Certain memorable phrases come to mind at this time: “long dark night of the soul”, “the winter of our discontent” in which memories of past experiences and the pain of present experiences can become overwhelming. For some Christmas Day is the most difficult. For others, Christmas Eve, or New Years’ Eve, or the beginning of another lonely New Year. In this service, we’ll share in some singing appropriate to the Christmas season, recognizing that this is not a season of joy for everyone. We will invite you to reflect on the pain, the loneliness, and the sadness you may feel and offer it all to our great sign of hope, the Christ Child. We pray that you will find hope and comfort in knowing that you are not alone. Will you please join me in prayer:*

Congregation: **Dear Heavenly Father, we come to you this day to acknowledge the “blue feelings” we are having at this Christmas time. Sometimes we even feel guilty because we have these feelings. The world tells us it is supposed to be a time of joy and celebration and yet it can be some of the darkest times for us. We offer up to you all those things we are feeling and all the situations that worry us and ask that you heal our pains and remove the loneliness. Help us to recognize the pressures of the season that drag us into the darkness and turn them over to you. We wait upon the Lord. Amen.**

***Hymn:**

O Come, All Ye Faithful

UMH #234, v. 1

Candle Lighting Litany of Remembrance

Minister: *We light this Advent candle to remember those persons who have been loved and lost. We pause to remember their name, their face, their voice. We give thanks for the memory that binds them to us this season which anticipates Christmas.*

All: May God’s eternal love surround them.

Reader: *We light the second candle to redeem the pain of loss: the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, the loss of health. 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.*

All: Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into your future.

Reader: *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 of down times. We remember the poignancy of memories, the grief, the sadness, the hurts, the pain of reflecting on our own mortality.*

All: Let us remember that dawn defeats darkness.

Reader: *This fourth candle is lit to remember our faith and the gift of hope which God offers to us in the Christmas story. We remember God who shares our life, promises us a place and time of no more*

pain and suffering.

All: Let us remember the one who shows the way and who goes with us into our tomorrow.

Hymn: *Silent Night, Holy Night* **UMH #239. v.1**

Old Testament Reading *Isaiah 61:1-4*

Hymn: *The First Noel* **UMH #245, v.1**

Responsive Psalter *Psalm 77 from The Message translation by Eugene Peterson*

Congregation: I yell out to my God, I yell with all my might, I yell at the top of my lungs.

Reader: *He listens. I found myself in trouble and went looking for my Lord; my life was an open wound that wouldn't heal. When friends said, "Everything will turn out right," I didn't believe a word they said. I remember God—and shake my head. I bow my head—and wring my hands. I'm awake all night—not a wink of sleep; I can't even say what is bothering me. I go over the days one by one; I ponder the years gone by. I strum my lute all through the night, wondering how to get my life together.*

Congregation: Will the Lord walk off and leave us for good? Will he never smile again? Is his love worn threadbare? Has his salvation promise burned out?

Reader: *Has God forgotten his manners? "Just my luck," I said. "The High God goes out of business just the moment I need him." Once again, "I'll go over what God has done, lay out on the table the ancient wonders; I'll ponder all the things you've accomplished, and give a long, loving look at your acts.*

Congregation: O God! Your way is holy! No god is great like God! You're the God who makes things happen; you showed everyone what you can do—

Reader: *You pulled your people out of the worst kind of trouble, rescued the children of Jacob and Joseph. Ocean saw you in action, God, saw you and trembled with fear; Deep Ocean was scared to death.*

Congregation: Clouds belched buckets of rain, sky exploded with thunder, your arrows flashing this way and that.

Reader: *From whirlwind came your thundering voice, lightning exposed the world, earth reeled and rocked. You strode right through Ocean, walked straight through roaring Ocean, but nobody saw you come or go.*

Congregation and Reader: Hidden in the hands of Moses and Aaron, You led your people like a flock of sheep. Now, lead us O God. Lead us into this season of hope and promise. Amen.

Hymn: *O Little Town of Bethlehem* **UMH #230, v. 1**

Reading of the Holy Gospel *Luke 2:1-8*

Reflective Words of Comfort and Hope

Scripture for Anointment

James 5:14-16

Thanksgiving over the oil

Invitation and Prayers of Anointment

Time of Lighting the Candles of Hope and Inspiration

*Congregational Prayer

Almighty God, we pray that our brothers and sisters may be comforted in their suffering and made whole. When they are afraid, give them courage; when they feel weak, grant them strength; when they are afflicted, afford them patience; when they are lost, offer them hope; when they are alone, move us to their side. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

*Hymn:

Hark! the Herald Angels Sing

UMH #240, v.1

*Closing Prayer

Minister: *Most Gracious Heavenly Father, at the beginning of this service we shared those things that cause us to call this time of year a Blue Christmas. We now offer all of them up to you. Please attend to all these needs. Lord in your mercy,*

All: Hear our prayer.

Minister: *Compassionate God, we ask that you free us from the darkness that traps us in our sadness. We ask the words be spoken even when we cannot express them ourselves. Our experience of Christmas has been changed because of a death or loss or physical or mental illness. We used to look forward to this time of year, too, but now we only feel like we are outside looking in on the joy. Bring back the joy. Lord in your mercy,*

All: Hear our prayer.

Minister: *The holiday season reminds us of what used to be. But the celebration of Your Son's birth, the real Christmas, reminds us of hope and promise. Please be near us this day. Lord, in your mercy,*

All: Hear our prayer. Amen.

*Benediction

*Postlude

O Little Town of Bethlehem Redner, arr. Alexander

**Congregation, please stand as you are able.*