Blue Christmas Worship Service
A Service of Hope and Healing

Sunday, December 15, 2019
3:00 pm

I will light candles this Christmas;
Candles of joy despite all sadness,
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch,
Candles of courage for fears ever present,
Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens,
Candles of love to inspire all my living,
Candles that will burn all the year long.

Howard Thurman

A Member of the Presbyterian Church (USA)
And the Presbytery of New Hope

This is God’s House! All are Welcome!
The Order of Service

♦ = Congregation Standing as Able
✝= Appropriate times to be Seated when Arriving After Service Begins

THE PRELUDE: “Be Still My Soul”..........................................................arr. Whitworth

THE GREETING

LEADER: In this season when we are expecting the joy of Christ’s coming, we are near the time of the longest night of the year. We know that for some members of our community every night appears endless and the prospect of a new day seems dim. For all of us the troubles of the world are ever-present as we pray and watch with victims of violence, hunger, illness, and disaster, close at hand and throughout the earth. We are called therefore to gather as a whole community, surrounded by love, and listen to God’s word, remember God’s promises, and praise God who is the source of all light and hope. The Lord be with you.

PEOPLE: And also with you.

✝THE CALL TO WORSHIP (Spoken Responsively)

LEADER: Consider and answer me, O Lord my God; lighten my eyes lest I sleep the sleep of death; lest my enemies say “I have prevailed over him;” lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.

PEOPLE: We come to you, O Lord seeking answers to our questions. We come to you, O God, because you are the Creator.

LEADER: But I have trusted your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.

ALL: We come looking for a song to sing; we wait for your voice to call us beyond our fear.

✝✝THE HYMN NO. 88: “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (vs. 1-3) .......Veni Emmanuel

THE OPENING PRAYER

LEADER ONE: Come Lord Jesus. When we are weak, afraid, lonely, or sad, when we cannot sing Christmas joy.

PEOPLE: Come, Lord Jesus.

LEADER TWO: Gather us under your wings as a mother hen shelters her chicks.

PEOPLE: Come, Lord Jesus.

LEADER ONE: Weep with us as you wept with Mary and Martha.

PEOPLE: Come, Lord Jesus.

LEADER TWO: You know the cold and hunger of a stable; now share our loneliness.

PEOPLE: Come, Lord Jesus.

LEADER ONE: You know the power of our enemy death; now comfort and sustain us.

PEOPLE: Come, Lord Jesus.

LEADER TWO: Make your home with us and share our every load.

PEOPLE: Come, Lord Jesus.

LEADER ONE: You are the Son of righteousness, risen with healing in your wings.

PEOPLE: Come, Lord Jesus.
LEADER: Give us life and light through the long night and bring us to your joy in the morning. In your name we pray.

PEOPLE: Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

THE ACT OF FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

LEADER: I invite you now to answer God’s call to be reconciled to one another and to God. Let us put aside discord and conflict, ask for forgiveness and make peace in the name of the Prince of Peace. Let us pray together.

God of mercy, you hear us when we cry to you and you come to save us. Touch us now with your healing power. Help us to lay before you every regret and disappointment; give us courage to bring to you our grief and pain. Teach us to live together in love with our neighbors, and pardon us when we have acted against your will. Encourage us with your love; guide our feet in the way of peace. In the name of Jesus, the healer, who binds all wounds and forgives our sins. Amen.

(Silent Prayers)

THE ASSURANCE OF GOD’S FORGIVENESS

THE SCRIPTURE READING: Revelation 21:1-5.............. The Rev. Dr. Jody Moore

AN ADVENT LITURGY OF REMEMBERING

Leader One: We light this 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 that anticipates Christ. (Pause while the first candle is lit.)

People: May God’s eternal love surround them.

Leader Two: We light this second candle to redeem the pain and loss: the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, and the loss of health. As we gather up the pain of the past, we offer it to you, O God, asking that into our welcome hearts and open hands you place the gift of peace. (Pause while the second candle is lit.)

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

Leader One: We light this third candle to remember ourselves this Christmastime. 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, and the pain of reflecting on our own mortality. (Pause while the third candle is lit.)

People: Let us remember that dawn defeats darkness.

Leader Two: The fourth candle is lit to remember our faith and the gift of hope that the Christmas story offers us. We remember that God, who shares our life, promises us a place and time when suffering and pain will be no more. (Pause while the fourth candle is lit.)

People: Let us remember the One who shows the way, who brings the truth, and who bears the light.

(We leave the Christ candle unlit as a sign of waiting for a future that is yet unknown to us, from which God beckons us.)

♦THE HYMN NO. 792: “There Is a Balm in Gilead” ......................... BALM IN GILEAD
THE PRAYER FOR THE SICK AND THE SORROWING

Come, long-expected Jesus, hope of all the earth, joy of longing hearts: You look with tender mercy on all who suffer; you promise that death will be destroyed; and you offer your healing balm to the sick. Come to those whose lives are touched by sadness, for you are all compassion, pure unbounded love. Keep those we love in life and death in your embrace. Remember those whose names we bring before you now (you are invited to pray silently or aloud for any individuals on your hearts and minds).

Give those we have named, those we have lifted up silently, and those whose needs we are not aware of the comfort of your presence and make them whole again. Grant us healing and peace. We pray all this in Jesus’ holy name, Amen.

THE INVITATION TO ANOINTING

Leader Two: The book of James in the New Testament tells us, “Are any among you suffering? Then they should pray. Are they cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.

Leader One: The act of anointing with oil, a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit and the care of the community, is available to all who long for the healing touch of God’s hand to still our troubled minds and to comfort us in pain and sickness. You are invited to come forward and we will anoint your forehead with healing balm so that you may receive comfort and blessing from our Lord.

THE ANOINTING

THE CLOSING PRAYER AND THE LORD’S PRAYER

(A portion of the prayer comes from Guerrillas of Grace by Ted Loder)

O God of all seasons and senses, grant us the sense of your timing to submit gracefully and rejoice quietly in the turn of the seasons. In this season of short days and long nights, of grey and white and cold, teach us the lessons of endings: children growing, friends leaving, loved ones dying, grieving over, grudges over, blaming over, excuses over. We lift up all of the prayer requests that have been made in this service. Reassure us with your good hope.

O God, grant us a sense of your timing. In this season of short days and long nights, of grey and white and cold, teach us the lessons of beginnings; that such waiting and endings may be the starting place, a planting of seeds which bring to birth what is ready to be born—something right and just and different, a new song, a deeper relationship, a fuller love—in the fullness of your time. O God, grant us peace and give us hope for your joy to come in the morning.

Now hear us as we pray the prayer your Son taught us: 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, the power and the glory forever. Amen.

♦ THE HYMN NO. 836: “Abide with Me” (Vs 1-3) ........................................... EVENTIDE

♦ THE DISMISSAL & BLESSING

THE ORGAN POSTLUDE: “Beautiful Savior” ........................................... arr. Evans