



Westminster United Church
A Blue Christmas Service
December 20, 2017

Rev. Sherri McConnell, Minister
Don Menzies, Organist
Nathan Poole, Director of Music in Worship
Rebecca McIntosh, Soloist

PRELUDE

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

CALL TO WORSHIP

The eternal God is your dwelling place,
And underneath are the everlasting arms. [Deut. 33.27]
As a mother comforts her child,
so you comfort us, O God;
you shall be comforted in Jerusalem;
as a father has compassion for his children, [Ps. 103:13]
so the Lord is compassionate and merciful. [Is. 66:13]

HYMN VU 55 In The Bleak Midwinter

PRAYER OF APPROACH

**God of comfort and compassion,
We come to you this evening,
 aware of the shadows in our light,
 and the tears
 in the tinsel of Christmas preparations
Hear our prayers:
 for ourselves,
 our families, our friends
 and for all who may be lost and lonely.
We ask for strength for today,
 courage for tomorrow,
 and peace for the past.
We pray through Christ who takes on our weariness. Amen.**

SCRIPTURE AND REFLECTION

READING: LUKE 1:26-34

REFLECTION

Leader: A world turned upside down...

...This is an experience that would change her to the core of her being.

All: We all have times when we can see ourselves in Mary's story. Life is planned. We have a sense of direction and purpose, and then something happens. And then everything turns upside down, and we are filled with a sense of doubt, uncertainty, and a sense of life being out of control. And in our disbelief, we call out, "Why did this happen? How did this happen? Why me, why us, why now?"

Leader: Sometimes when we don't know which way to turn, we can take a moment, slow down, and quietly reflect. In the quiet, we can then notice deep within us the burning presence of a guiding light. It is *through* our pain, our sorrow and our fears that God's Love will find us. And in quiet reflection, our hearts can open, God's light can shine in...and a new path can emerge.

All: Into our disbelief light shines... the light of hope.

(candle is lit)

READING: Luke 1:35-38

REFLECTION

Leader: “Let it be with me just as you say.” I am guessing the change in her life was ...

... But for now, all she could do was put one foot in front of the other, and keep going...

All: We all have times when we can see ourselves in Mary’s story. Life happens. Sometimes we make decisions or choices, or judge incorrectly, and end up in a place we don’t recognize. Sometimes we don’t even make the decisions or the changes – they happen to us. Through death and loss and brokenness, we end up in places we don’t recognize or want to be in. And then we find ourselves wandering and lost, in unfamiliar territory and uncertain terrain, fearing the road we see ahead.

Leader: There are no easy answers, and sometimes there are no answers at all. Sometimes all we can do is acknowledge our pain, our grief and our sorrow. And in those moments of pain and sorrow and grief, those moments of holy space, God’s Love will find us. God’s light will shine into the darkness of our hearts as we put one foot in front of the other, and slowly find our way forward.

All: Into our vulnerability light shines... the light of peace.

(candle is lit)

READING: LUKE 1:39-56

REFLECTION

Leader: So there in the midst of her fear and uncertainty, her doubts and concerns...

... But in the meantime, Elizabeth will take Mary in, and offer friendship and hospitality for as long as Mary needs it.

All: We all have times when we can see ourselves in Mary's story.

Leader: Life is fragile...

...and that by God's grace we can step out in hope and faith, and face whatever lies before us.

All: Into our loneliness and insecurity light shines... the light of Compassion.

(candle is lit)

Leader: Our world is one full of confusion, pain, and sorrow, and yet ...
...in the light of our candles tonight we receive the promise of Emmanuel...the promise of faith... that God with us... and we are blessed.

**All: Into our lives light shines...the light of faith. (candle is lit)
Oh come Emmanuel, God with us. Thanks be to God, now and forever. Amen.**

SOLO I Wonder as I Wander collected, adapt. / arr. by John Jacob Niles given by Rebecca McIntosh

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONCERN

Prayer

Oh Holy God, around us the singing can be heard: 'Joy to the World... let Heaven and Nature sing.' This season is to be one where hope eases our minds, when peace soothes our hearts, when love warms our souls, and when joy comes each morning.

Gracious God, there are many who do not feel this joy. Some might try, others have given up trying. The world seems to have found joy but some feel as if it has passed them by. Where, O God, can joy be found?

Holy One, our minds are often not at ease... we feel too much doubt. Our hearts are often not at peace... there is too much to do. Our souls are often not warmed... the chill of death too troubling... the uncertainty of illness too unsettling.

Where, O God, can joy be found?

Gracious God, as we seek to open ourselves to your gifts of hope, peace, joy, and love, hear all our prayers of concern and care that we hold in our hearts this evening -

we pray this evening for the lonely, that they might find comfort in another's touch.

We pray for the struggling and those without hope, that they might

find relief from their burdens.

We pray for those wrestling with depression, that a light of calm might bring them peace.

We pray for those dealing with stress, that they might find the courage to let go.

We pray for the grief-stricken, that they might experience the comfort and newness of life that you bring.

May joy come to the world, O God, and may we grasp some of that.

We do not pray for joy that is temporary or fleeting, but a joy that runs deep, and sustains us even in moments of despair. Grant us strength for each day, courage to reach out as we need to, and the daring to pray always.

Gently nudge us along our path, and into your future, in hope and faith in your eternal presence in our midst....

Come to us Emmanuel, God-with-us. And in the shadows of our lives, may your joy-filled light shine. Amen.

RITUAL OF CANDLE LIGHTING

HYMN VU 67 Silent Night, Holy Night

BENEDICTION:

May God bless you and keep you.

May God's face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

May God look on you with kindness and give you peace

Amen

POSTLUDE

*Following the service you are welcome to remain
for refreshments and a time of fellowship.*



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