



Westminster United Church

A Blue Christmas Service

December 19, 2018

Rev. Sherri McConnell, Minister

Don Menzies, Organist

Nathan Poole, Director of Music in Worship, Violin

Fred Simpson, Soloist

Words printed in **bold type** are to be spoken by the congregation.

PRELUDE

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

CENTERING MUSIC

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 our God is compassionate and merciful. [Is. 66:13]

HYMN VU 64 Oh Little Town of Bethlehem (St. Louis)

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.

How silently, how silently
the wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
the blessed gift of 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 today.
We hear the Christmas angels
the great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
our Lord Emmanuel.

PRAYER OF APPROACH (unison)

God of compassion,

Be with us as we gather in this holy space;

**Surround us with your sacred presence, quiet our anxious souls
and settle our unsettled selves.**

Comfort our heavy hearts,

**and sorrow we may feel in the face of Christmas preparations
and festivities;**

**And may the light of our gathering lift the shadows of despair as
we pray for ourselves, our family members, our friends
and for all who feel lost and lonely.**

**Gracious God, we ask for strength for today,
courage for tomorrow,**

and peace for the past.

In the name of Christ, we pray, 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. Everything turns upside down, and we are filled with a sense of doubt, uncertainty, and life being out of control. 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, all we can do is take a moment, slow down, and quietly be. And in the quiet, we can then notice deep within us the burning presence of a guiding light, a guiding wisdom. 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, 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 shadows 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 is with us, and we are blessed.

All: Into our lives light shines - the light of faith. (candle is lit)

Friends, let us give thanks for those moments of light, those moments of quiet, those moments of wisdom and courage, and those moments of hope, peace, compassion, and faith.

All: Oh come Emmanuel, God with us. Thanks be to God, now and forever. Amen.

SOLO I Wonder as I Wander
given by Fred Simpson

by J.J. Niles

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONCERN

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, peace soothes our hearts, love warms our souls, and joy comes each morning.

Gracious God, there are many who do not feel this joy. Some might try, others have given up. For some, the world seems to have found joy but for others it can feel as if joy passes us 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 and grief 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 joy.

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, the 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. In the shadows and cracks of our lives, may your joy-filled light shine through. Amen.

RITUAL OF CANDLE LIGHTING - *At this time, all will be invited to come forward to light a candle in memory, in reflection, in hope, in prayer.*

Away in a Manger arr. by Rich Heffler
given by Don Menzies and Nathan Poole

HYMN VU 55 In the Bleak Midwinter

**In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,
earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,
in the bleak midwinter, long ago.**

**Our God, heaven cannot hold him, nor earth sustain;
heaven and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign;
in the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed
the Lord God almighty, Jesus Christ.**

**Enough for him, whom cherubim worship night and day,
a breast full of milk, and a manger full of hay.
Enough for him, whom angels fall down before,
the ox and ass and camel which adore.**

**What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
if I were a wise man, I would do my part;
yet what I can I give him - give my heart.**

BENEDICTION:

In this time of miracles and holy mystery,
may God bless you and keep you.

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

And 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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