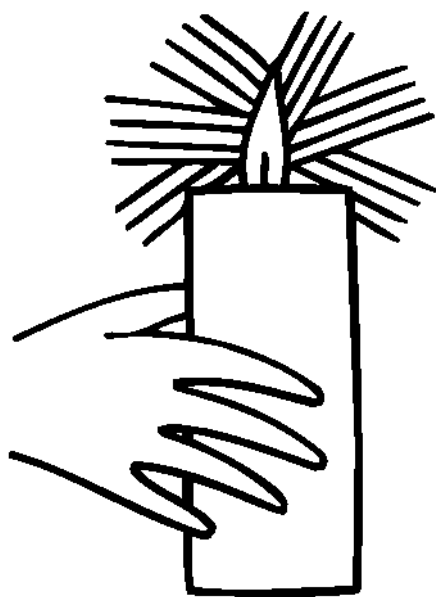


Blue Christmas Service

December 16, 2020



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Clearwater, Florida 33755

Ministers: The People of Grace Lutheran Church

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Pastor: Rev. Jefferson Cox

While Advent is a season of hope and Christmas is a season of joy, not everyone feels hopeful or like celebrating. Grief, illness, aging, depression, loneliness, unemployment, and loss are magnified. Even those who are not struggling with losses may feel the stress of preparations and expectations around Christmas time. In this year in particular, we offer this opportunity to share with God our sadness, our frustration, and our fatigue.

GREETING

Worship Leader: From the one who was, who is, and who is to come: Grace and peace be with you all.

Congregation: And also with you.

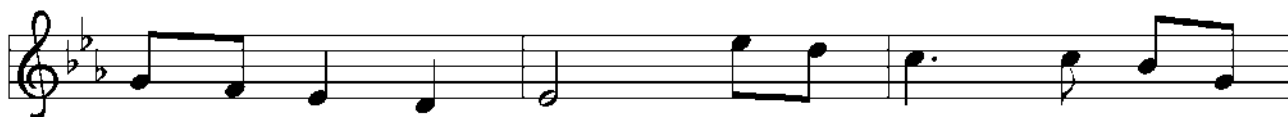
HYMN OF LIGHT



1 Joy - ous light of heav'n-ly glo - ry, lov-ing glow of God's own
2 In the stars that grace the dark - ness, in the blaz - ing sun of
3 You who made the heav-en's splen - dor, ev - ry danc - ing star of



face, you who sing cre - a - tion's sto - ry, shine on
dawn, in the light of peace and wis - dom, we can
night, make us shine with gen - tle jus - tice, let us



ev - 'ry land and race. Now as eve - ning falls a -
hear your qui - et song. Love that fills the night with
each re - flect your light. Might - y God of all cre -



round us, we shall raise our songs to you. God of day - break,
won - der, love that warms the wea - ry soul, love that bursts all
a - tion, gen - tle Christ who lights our way, lov - ing Spir - it



God of shad - ows, come and light our hearts a - new.
chains a - sun - der, set us free and make us whole.
of sal - va - tion, lead us on to end - less day.

Text: Greek hymn, 3rd cent., para. Marty Haugen. b. 1950

Music: JOYOUS LIGHT, Marty Haugen

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THANKSGIVING FOR THE LIGHT

Worship Leader: The Lord be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

Worship Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

Congregation: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Worship Leader: We give you thanks, O God, for in the beginning you called light into being, and you set light in the sky to govern night and day. In a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night you led your people into freedom. Enlighten our darkness by the light of your Christ: may your Word be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path; for you are merciful, and you love your whole creation, and with all your creatures we give you glory, through your Son Jesus Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

Congregation: Amen.

FIRST READING

Isaiah 9:2-7

Introduction to the Lesson: *This poem promises deliverance from Assyrian oppression, a hope based on the birth of a royal child with a name full of promise. While Judah's king will practice justice and righteousness, the real basis for faith lies in God's passion for the people: The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this!*

After the reading...

Reader: The word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING

Isaiah 40:1-11

Introduction to the Lesson: *In grand, flowing, poetic lines, the prophet announces that the exile of God's people in Babylon is over. God will deliver Israel and will care for her as a shepherd cares for the sheep. This word can be trusted, because the only enduring reality in life is the word of God.*

After the reading...

Reader: The word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God.

THIRD READING

Matthew 11:28-30

Introduction to the Lesson: *In the face of religious authorities who needlessly created extra burdens on the people of God for their own benefit, Jesus offers a way in which he himself takes on the heavy lifting of salvation.*

After the reading...

Reader: The word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God.

FOURTH READING

John 1:1-5, 14

Introduction to the Lesson: *John begins his gospel with this prologue: a hymn to the Word through whom all things were created. This Word became flesh and brought grace and truth to the world.*

After the reading...

Reader: The word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God.

REFLECTION

HYMN

Comfort, Comfort Now My People vs. 1 & 3



1 "Com - fort, com-fort now my peo - ple; tell of peace!" So says our God.
2 For the her - ald's voice is cry - ing in the des - ert far and near,
3 Straight shall be what long was crook - ed, and the rough - er plac - es plain.



Com-fort those who sit in dark - ness mourn-ing un - der sor - row's load.
call - ing us to true re - pen - tance, since the reign of God is here.
Let your hearts be true and hum - ble, as be-fits God's ho - ly reign.



To God's peo - ple now pro-claim that God's par - don waits for them!
Oh, that warn - ing cry o - bey! Now pre - pare for God a way.
For the glo - ry of the Lord now on earth is shed a - broad,



Tell them that their war is o - ver; God will reign in peace for-ev - er.
Val - leys, rise to greet the Sav - ior; hills, bow down in hum-ble fa - vor.
and all flesh shall see the to - ken that God's word is nev - er bro - ken.

PRAYERS

Prayer Leader: We pray for those of us who live with depression, anxiety, chronic pain, addiction, and other invisible illnesses. Be with those who struggle with the reality of their own emotional state and the expectations of the holiday season, especially those we name now with our lips or in our hearts... Lord, in your mercy,

Congregation: hear our prayer.

Prayer Leader: We pray for those who have been traumatized by the ravages of COVID-19 - those who have gotten sick, those who have lost people they love, those who have lost employment or income, those who have missed unique moments in life, and those who live in constant danger due to their profession or other circumstance, including those we name now with our lips or in our hearts... Lord, in your mercy,

Congregation: hear our prayer.

Prayer Leader: We pray for our nation and society as we continue to experience division and distrust after our contentious political campaigns and election experiences. Help us to mend broken friendships, partnerships, marriages, and family bonds due to differing politics that continue even through the holiday season. We pray especially for those we name now with our lips or in our hearts... Lord, in your mercy,

Congregation: hear our prayer.

Prayer Leader: We pray for this congregation as we seek to stay connected to you and to each other through worship, and yet intentionally distance ourselves from each other and even from you for the sake of helping to push back against the spread of this dread disease. Help us to be patient, creative, and careful as we move into a less-certain future... Lord, in your mercy,

Congregation: hear our prayer.

Prayer Leader: We give you thanks for all of those who help us to overcome all of these challenges - therapists and counselors, researchers and medical trial participants, nurses and doctors, civic leaders and representatives, bishops and other religious leaders, teachers and administrators, friends and family. Through each of them your light shines, and in each of them your image is revealed. We give you thanks especially for those we name now with our lips or in our hearts... Lord, in your mercy,

Congregation: hear our prayer.

Worship Leader: Receive these prayers, O God, and those too deep for words; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Congregation: Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

Worship Leader: Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray in the language closest to our hearts.

Congregation: 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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

BLESSING

Worship Leader: The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord's face shine on you with grace and mercy. The Lord look upon you with favor and + give you peace .

Congregation: Amen.

SENDING SONG

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear



1 It came up - on the mid - night clear, that glo - rious song of old,
2 Still through the clo - ven skies they come with peace - ful wings un - furled,



from an - gels bend - ing near the earth to touch their harps of gold:
and still their heav'n - ly mu - sic floats o'er all the wea - ry world.



"Peace on the earth, good will to all, from heav'n's all - gra - cious king."
A - bove its sad and low - ly plains they bend on hov - 'ring wing,



The world in sol - emn still - ness lay to hear the an - gels sing.
and ev - er o'er its ba - bel sounds the bless - ed an - gels sing.

Text: Edmund H. Sears, 1810–1876

Music: CAROL., Richard S. Willis, 1819–1900

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