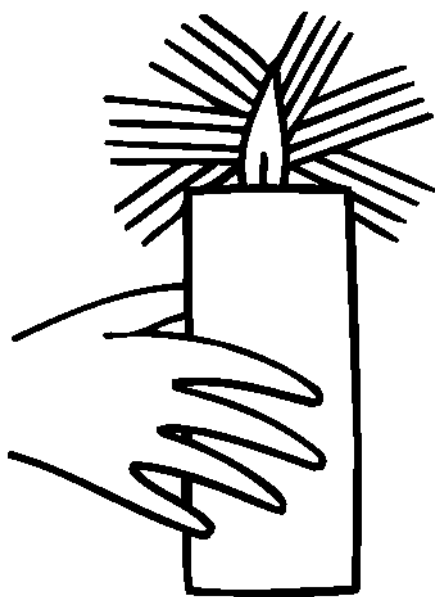


# *Blue Christmas Service*

*December 6, 2023*



1812 North Highland Avenue  
Clearwater, Florida 33755

Ministers: The People of Grace Lutheran Church

727-446-5026

**office@GraceCLW.com**

Pastor: Rev. Jefferson Cox

*While Advent is a season of hope and Christmas is a season of joy, not everyone feels hopeful or joyful. 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 Christmastime. It is our privilege to 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.

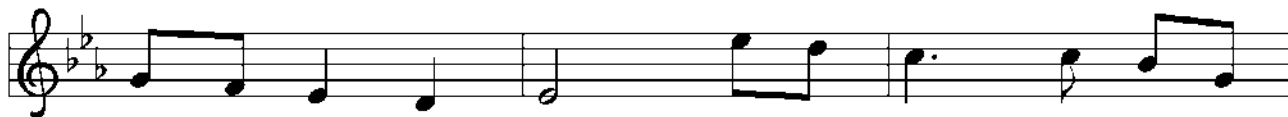
## HYMN OF LIGHT



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!*

<sup>2</sup> The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness —  
on them light has shined.

<sup>3</sup> You have multiplied the nation,  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as people exult when dividing plunder.

<sup>4</sup> For the yoke of their burden,  
and the bar across their shoulders,  
the rod of their oppressor,  
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

<sup>5</sup> For all the boots of the tramping warriors  
and all the garments rolled in blood  
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

<sup>6</sup> For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
and he is named

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

<sup>7</sup>His authority shall grow continually,  
and there shall be endless peace  
for the throne of David and his kingdom.  
He will establish and uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time onward and forevermore.  
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.*

<sup>1</sup>Comfort, O comfort my people,  
says your God.

<sup>2</sup>Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her  
that she has served her term,  
that her penalty is paid,  
that she has received from the LORD's hand  
double for all her sins.

<sup>3</sup>A voice cries out:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

<sup>4</sup>Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain.

<sup>5</sup>Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,  
and all people shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

<sup>6</sup>A voice says, "Cry out!"

And I said, "What shall I cry?"

All people are grass,  
their constancy is like the flower of the field.

<sup>7</sup>The grass withers, the flower fades,  
when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;  
surely the people are grass.

<sup>8</sup>The grass withers, the flower fades;  
but the word of our God will stand forever.

<sup>9</sup>Get you up to a high mountain,  
O Zion, herald of good tidings;  
lift up your voice with strength,  
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,  
lift it up, do not fear;  
say to the cities of Judah,  
"Here is your God!"

<sup>10</sup>See, the Lord GOD comes with might,  
and his arm rules for him;  
his reward is with him,  
and his recompense before him.

<sup>11</sup>He will feed his flock like a shepherd;  
he will gather the lambs in his arms,  
and carry them in his bosom,  
and gently lead the mother sheep.

*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.*

<sup>28</sup>Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

*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.*

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things came into being through him, and

without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup>in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

<sup>14</sup>And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

*After the reading...*

Reader: The word of the Lord.

**Congregation: Thanks be to God.**

## REFLECTION

### HYMN

#### *Comfort, Comfort Now My People*



- 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 our nation and society as we continue to experience division and distrust after contentious political campaigns, trials, health measures, and other experiences. Help us to mend broken friendships, partnerships, marriages, and family bonds due to disagreements that can be further amplified during 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 and the whole Church around the world as we seek clarity about the shape of the future for us. Help us to be patient, faithful, creative, and careful as we move along an often uncertain path... 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 verses 1 & 2*



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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