

## Centering Music

### Gathering and Words of Welcome

#### \* Call to Worship

One: Remember the messengers of faith you have known.  
Rejoice and give thanks for their witness.

**Many: We, too, will prepare the way of Christ;  
we will help to level the hills and valleys of life.**

One: Hold one another in your hearts this day;  
pray that love may rule all your relationships.

**Many: We will weep with those who weep.  
We will rejoice with those who rejoice.**

One: God will be with you wherever you go. AMEN.

\* Hymn #122 Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus (verse 1, 4)

#### Gathering Prayer (Unison)

**God of love and understanding, we gather here this evening to  
confront our pain in the midst of the world's celebration. Help us  
know that you are present with us in all of our moods and feelings  
and seasons. Grant us a taste of the hope, peace, joy, and love that  
you promise to all of your children through the gift of your son Jesus.  
AMEN.**

Assurance of Pardon

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. The light  
shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Those who  
dwell in the land of deep darkness, on them has the light shined. For unto  
us a child is born, unto us a Son is given. In Him was life, and the life was  
the light of all people.

Hymn # 128 In the Bleak Midwinter (verse 1, 2)

### A LITURGY OF REMEMBERING

We light four candles tonight in honor of our loved ones. We light one for  
our **grief**, one for our **courage**, one for our **memories**, and one for our  
**love**.

This first candle represents our **grief**. We own the pain of losing loved  
ones, of dreams that go unfulfilled, of hopes that evaporate in despair.  
[Reader lights a candle; brief silence follows.]

#### READING:

"Some of us walk into Advent tethered to our unresolved yesterdays  
the pain still stabbing; the hurt still throbbing. It's not that we don't know  
better; it's just that we can't stand up anymore by ourselves.  
On the way to Bethlehem, will you give us a hand?" — Ann Weems

This second candle represents our courage. It symbolizes the courage it  
takes to confront our sorrow, to comfort each other, to share our feelings  
honestly and openly with each other, and to dare to hope in the midst of  
pain. [Reader lights a candle; a brief silence follows.]

#### READING:

In the middle of the night, when stark night was darkest,  
Then you chose to come.

God's resplendent first-born sent to make us one.

The voices of doom protest:

"All these words about justice, love and peace—

All these naïve words will buckle beneath the weight  
of a reality which is brutal and bitter, ever more bitter."

It is true, Lord, it is midnight upon the earth,  
moonless night and starved of stars.

But can we forget that You, the son of God, chose to be born precisely  
at midnight?

-Dom Helder Camara

This third candle represents our memories. For the times we laughed  
together, cried together, were angry with each other or overjoyed with  
each other. We light this candle for the memories of caring and joy we  
shared together. [Reader lights a candle; a brief silence follows.]

#### READING: (from a prayer by Anselm of Canterbury)

Jesus said, "Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I  
will give you rest." And so we invite each other to this time of peaceful  
remembrance. Flee for a while from your judgment; Hide yourself for a  
little space from the turmoil of your thoughts.

Cast aside your burdensome sorrow and put aside your laborious grief.  
Thrust yourself upon the mercy of your God, and rest in God for a little  
while.

This fourth candle represents our love. The love we have given, and the love we have received. The love that has gone unacknowledged and unfelt - and the love that has been shared in times of joy and sorrow. [Reader lights a candle; a brief silence follows.]

**READING:** “First Coming” by Madeleine L’Engle

God did not wait till the world was ready, till nations were at peace.  
God came when the Heavens were unsteady and prisoners cried out for release.

God did not wait for the perfect time.

God came when the need was deep and great.

God dined with sinners in all their grime, turned water into wine.

God did not wait till hearts were pure.

In joy God came to a tarnished world of sin and doubt.

To a world like ours, of anguished shame, God came and God’s Light would not go out.

God came to a world that did not mesh; to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.

In the mystery of the Word made Flesh, the maker of the stars was born.

We cannot wait till the world is sane to raise our songs with joyful voice, or to share our grief.

God came with Love to touch our pain.

In spite of our tears we can for that rejoice.

### **COMMUNITY CANDLE LIGHTING**

Let all who wish to light a candle to remember a loved one, to remember a loss, to remember a relationship, come forward now to do so. Light a candle in remembrance and as an act of remembering. Like our lives, each candle is in darkness until it is filled by the light of Christ.

**Hymn** #116 O Come, O Come Emmanuel (verse 1)

### **PASTORAL PRAYER FOLLOWED BY SILENT PRAYER**

**One:** These lights in their brightness are only symbols, but as they burn and finally go out, we remember that suffering passes, though memory remains forever.

**Many** **Let us remember that though Christ has gone before us he is ever and always with us.**

**Hymn** # 99 *Abide with Me* (Vs. 1)

**Benediction**

**Postlude**

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## *Blue Christmas*

**December 19, 2017 – Advent Year B**



*Doris Merrill*

ALL ARE WELCOME

*“Friend, you enter this church not as a stranger, but as a guest of God.  
Come, then, with joy in your heart and thanks upon your lips,  
and offer God today your love and your service.”*

(Adapted from a 12th Century Church in Hampshire, England)