



Blue Christmas Service
Compiled by Ana Gobledale*

A one-hour reflective service
on a December afternoon or evening
16 readers (or double-up)

Order of Service

Welcome: Worship Leader

Welcome to _____ on this dark winter
afternoon/evening for this Blue Christmas service.
We can ask, “Why are we here?”

Gathering Words:

Reader 1:

Christmas can be a painful time for some. It may be the first
Christmas without loved family members who have recently died.
It may be a time that has always been difficult.

The constant refrain on radio and television, in stores and churches,
about the happiness of the season, about getting together with
family and friends, reminds many people of what they have lost or
have never had. The anguish of broken relationships, the insecurity
of unemployment, the weariness of ill health, the pain of isolation ~
all these can make us feel very alone in the midst of the celebrating
and spending.

We need the space and time to acknowledge our sadness and
concern. We need to know that we are not alone.

Our spirits sink, as days grow shorter.

We feel the darkness growing deeper around us.

We need encouragement to live the days ahead of us.

Reader 2:

This “Blue” Christmas Service is a way to acknowledge the
pain that the Advent and Christmas seasons sometimes ignore
and sometimes cause. The emphasis on family, joy, giving,
and “good cheer” can be difficult for those of us who have
experienced loss of another through death, relocation, or
broken relationships. It can unpleasant for those who live with
depression or other illnesses; those who have no jobs or little
money for giving; and those whose addictions make the
emphasis on parties very stressful.

Reader 1:

Today on this afternoon/evening in Advent, we gather to
acknowledge our pain and to be open to a glimpse of the light of
Christ. And so we light the Christ candle.
[Pause and light the white candle.]

Reader 2:

This flicker of light will burn throughout the service,
symbolizing for us the light of Christ that shines
and can be extinguished by no darkness.
May the words, the music and the silence,
and the flames of candles, open a channel in your heart
to the warm engulfing love of God.

Call to Worship (from Isaiah 9) Reader 3:

As we gather to worship in the darkness,
hear the reassuring words of the prophet Isaiah:

In the time of our sorrow, God is with us.

*The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light.*

*On those who lived in a land of deep shadow
a light has shone.*

*For the yoke that was weighing upon them,
and the burden upon their shoulders,*

God, our Redeemer, has broken in pieces.

Let us turn our hearts and minds to the worship of our God.

Opening Prayer (2 readers)

Reader 4:

Pray with me.
God of Mercy, hear our prayer this Advent season
for ourselves and our families
who live with the painful memories of loss.
We ask for strength for today, courage for tomorrow,
and peace for the past.
We look for light but find darkness,
for brightness, but walk in gloom.

Reader 5:

Come, gracious God, come in quiet hope.
Come in gentle assurance and tender mercy.
Come with healing to make us whole.
We ask these things in the name of your Christ
who shares our life in joy and sorrow,
death and new birth, despair and promise. Amen.

Reading *Isaiah 40: selected verses*

Two readers: Reader 6 and Reader 7

Reader 6:

This reading comes from the book of Isaiah.
It was written at a time when many of the people of Judah
had been taken as captives into exile in Babylon,
and were feeling crushed and without hope.
Before I read Isaiah's words, locate a place within yourself
that feels crushed and without hope. *[pause]*
May these words bring comfort, hope and strength to you,
as they did to the captives in Babylon.

Reader 7:

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God...
A voice cries out:
'In the wilderness, prepare the way of the LORD,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
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.
Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.'

Reader 6:

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.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.
The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand for ever. ...
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!'

Reader 7:

...Why do you say, O Jacob,
and speak, O Israel,
'My way is hidden from the LORD,
and my right is disregarded by my God?'
Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
God does not faint or grow weary;
God's understanding is unsearchable.
God gives power to the faint,
and strengthens the powerless.
Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;
but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.

Song/hymn *How can we sing a joyful song?*

Tune: "Lift up your heads, O Mighty Gates"

http://www.carolynshymns.com/how_can_we_sing_a_joyful_song.html

Poem

"Morning Poem" by Mary Oliver -- **Reader 8:**

(from "Dreamwork" collection, 1986)

<http://theidproject.org/blog/joren/2013/08/02/uses-sorrow-mary-oliver>

REFLECTION *A thoughtful message for the occasion*

One possibility (by Ana Gobbledale):

(Mary - dramatised)

Life often overwhelms me. My boy is dead. Killed.
Things were going along fairly smoothly until I was fourteen.
I got pregnant, and I did not even know who the father was.
Luckily Joseph, good kind Joseph,
he did not have me cast out or stoned,
but took me as his wife.
But then the pregnancy was hard,
as I had to travel for the census.
My poor child was born on the straw being fed to a cow,
filling the beast's manger.
Not even a bed for us.
Life has been hard.
Then King Herod went crazy!
He had all the little boys killed.
I was so afraid for my baby.
Joseph wisely had us flee to Egypt.
But I didn't know the language,
or the customs of the people.
I was always a foreigner there.
Everything was so strange.
Things seemed to return to normal
when we returned to Nazareth.
But life was always precarious under the Romans.
Now my boy is dead. Killed.
The darkness seems to want to wrap itself around me.
God, I know you are with me.
But today you feel so far away.

Reader 9:

The story of the first Christmas is not really a happy story,
but a story about life in the real world.
Unwed, pregnant and only fourteen years old.
Not a happy start to the story, or a relationship.
A country under occupation, a cruel ruler.
No security. No peace.
Not a happy setting for a story, or a new family.
The slaughter of innocent children.
For the people in Bethlehem, the birth of Jesus would always
remind them of the army that massacred their children.
Then Joseph's frightened little family, flees for their lives to a
strange land. Not a happy story. Mary, mother of Jesus, may her
faith through her darkness shine light into our lives.

Reading *Lamentations 3:1-3, 19-26* NRSV **Reader 10:**

I am one who has seen affliction
under the rod of God's wrath;
God has driven and brought me
into darkness without any light;
against me alone God turns a hand,
again and again, all day long.
The thought of my affliction and my homelessness
is wormwood and gall!
My soul continually thinks of it
and is bowed down within me.
But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:
The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,
God's mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
'The LORD is my portion,' says my soul,
'therefore I will hope in God.'
The LORD is good to those who wait,
to the soul that seeks God.
It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD.

Song/hymn

A LITURGY OF LIGHT & REMEMBERING (lighting the blue Advent candles)

Worship Leader: As we light four Advent candles throughout the season, tonight we light four candles to help us remember, both our pain and the hope of our faith. We light these candles to remind us that no darkness can banish the light of Christ from our lives.

Lighting first candle: Reader 11:

This first candle we light to remember those whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember their name, their face, their voice, the memory that binds them to us in this season.
[pause and light first candle.]

Worship Leader: We invite anyone who wishes to remember a person you have lost, to come forward and light a tea candle, place it on the table and, if you are comfortable doing so, say the name of your loved one aloud, that we all may share in this moment of light and remembrance.

Prayer (after candles are lit): Reader 11:

Let us pray. God, surround those we have loved and lost with your eternal love. Amen.

Lighting second candle Reader 12:

This second candle we light to redeem the pain of loss; the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, the loss of health. We pause to gather up the pain of the past and offer it to God, asking that from God's hands we might receive the gift of peace.
[pause and light second candle]

Worship Leader: I invite anyone who wishes to come forward and light a

tea light, place it on the table to mark a loss or disappointment in your life, and to ask God to shine light upon your situation.

Prayer (after candles are lit): Reader 12:

Let us pray. God, refresh, restore and renew us, and lead us into your future. Amen.

Reading Matthew 5:3-12a -- Reader 13:

Hear the words of Mary, mother of Jesus.
Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the reign of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Lighting third Candle Reader 14:

This third candle we light to remember ourselves this Christmastime. We pause and remember these past weeks and months; the disbelief, the anger, the down times, the memories shared, the hugs and handshakes of family and friends, all those who have stood with us. We pause to remember and give thanks for all the support we have received.
[pause and light third candle]

Worship Leader

I invite anyone who wishes to come forward and light a tea candle, place it on the table to give thanks for those who have supported and comforted you during your dark time. If you are comfortable doing so, say the person's name aloud, that we all may share in this moment of light and thanksgiving.

Prayer (after candles are lit): Reader 14:

Let us pray. God, we remember your promise that the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness will never extinguish it.

Song/hymn

Lighting fourth Candle Reader 15:

This fourth candle is lit to remember our faith and the gift of hope which the Christmas story offers to us. Let us call it “Mary’s candle.” Mary knew what it was like to be afraid. Mary knew also the wonder of God’s presence. We remember that God, Emmanuel, is with us, through the loss of those we love, and the frightening and disappointing events of our lives. God is the light and in God there is no darkness.
[pause and light fourth candle]

Worship Leader

As we celebrate Christmas this year may we, like Mary, have hope, believing that God can bring light into our darkness, that sorrow and the hurts of our lives will pass. They will not disappear, but they will be healed. And, like Mary, we will sing our own songs of praise.

Prayer: Reader 15:

Let us pray. You are the light of the world.
Be light in our darkness, O Christ.
We pray for ourselves, our loved ones and for the peace proclaimed by the Christmas angels, to come throughout the whole world.
God of great compassion and love, listen to the prayers of these your people. Grant to all, especially the bereaved and troubled ones this Christmas, / your blessing.

Lord’s Prayer (optional) Reader 15:

Grant to all, especially the bereaved and troubled ones this Christmas, / the blessing we ask in the name of Christ who taught us to pray together saying, *Our Father, who art in heaven...* [or another version: <http://worshipwords.co.uk/lords-prayer/>] Amen.

Benediction

Reader 1:

The light has splintered the darkness, Hope is ours once more.

Reader 2:

The light calls us forward; remembering the past and walking confidently into the future.

Worship Leader:

Let us close singing *Silent Night*.
You are invited to enjoy the space in silence after the service is over, and if you would like to talk with a Worship Leader or ask for prayer, we will be available.
[Dim lights]

Song/hymn *Silent Night*

Worship Leader:

Go from this holy time and space, filled with hope, peace and love, God’s gift to us all. Amen.

* * *

Authorship

*This service has been compiled using materials I’ve collected in bits and pieces over the years. I have not always been the best at keeping the source citation for items, so if you recognize something as yours, please notify me so that I may give you full credit as the author. Thank you.

Preparation & Planning

Song/hymns:

There are 4 song/hymns to choose for the service. I always open with *How can we sing a joyful song?* (Tune: *Lift up your heads, O Mighty Gates*)

http://www.carolynshymns.com/how_can_we_sing_a_joyful_song.html

Solo artists are my first choice for the other three songs/hymns. If using Christmas carols, I have used: O Little town of Bethlehem, In the Bleak Midwinter and Silent Night (traditional words).

Preparation and set-up: The worship space is important.

1. Cover 2-3 long tables with blue cloth covers (depending on number of people expected)
2. Tea lights in baskets
3. A lit candle or two on each long table.
4. BLUE Advent candles & matches
5. Electric candles? On window sills?
6. A box of tissue visible and available
7. Seating: ideally chairs arranged around the 2-3 long tables, 1-3 chairs deep. I've used the front pew along one side of the tables when the group has been small and only one row deep.

Handouts:

Printed 2-sided strips with thoughtful words and images for reflection printed on each side. I have used:

One side:

You are the light of the world;

be light in our darkness, O Christ.

The light shines in the darkness,

and the darkness has never been able to extinguish it.

Second side: The Uses of Sorrow by Mary Oliver

<http://theidproject.org/blog/joren/2013/08/02/uses-sorrow-mary-oliver>

*Someone I loved once gave me
a box full of darkness.*

*It took me years to understand
that this, too, was a gift.*