

Welcome to
**THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF
ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST**

*Committed to living a faith journey that is
sacred, intentional, compassionate and inclusive*



**Blue Christmas:
A Service of Healing and Hope
Historical Chapel**

Tuesday, December 19, 2023 ✦ 5:00 pm

Welcome to the Episcopal Church of St. John the Baptist!

This brief worship service, Blue Christmas, is an opportunity to get in touch with any grief that arises for you during this Season. We hope that after our time together, through prayer, music, and silence, participants will leave the service better able to be present to the season, amidst all life circumstances. Past participants in Blue Christmas worship have experienced benefits from quietly naming their grief before God. All who feel that they can benefit from this service, no matter their level of faith or connection to our denomination, are welcome here.

Those Who Serve Today

Presider/Preacher: The Rev. Betsy McElroy

Pianist: Kristy Wells

MC: Charlene Martin

Readers: Margaret Meyers, David Lujan, Jr. & Carol Foote

Greeter: Peggy Moos

Altar Guild: Peggy Moos & Margaret Meyers

Vestry Open/Close: Charlene Martin

Designer Guild: Charlene Martin

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The Rev. Betsy McElroy

Worship: Sundays 9:30 a.m.

Office Hours: 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., Monday through Thursday

1055 S. Lower Sacramento Road, Lodi, California 95242

209.369.3381 (voice) † stjohnslodi@sbcglobal.net † www.stjohnsoflodi.org

The service begins in silence so all may participate in a time of reflection.

Words of Welcome

The Rev. Betsy McElroy

Opening Hymn

Comfort, Comfort Ye My People

Hymnal 67

Call To Worship

Presider: The Lord be with you.

People: **And also with you.**

Presider: The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; on those who live in a land of deep shadow, a light has shone. For the yoke that was weighing upon them, and the burden upon their shoulders, you have broken in pieces, O God, our Redeemer.

Hymn

O Come, O Come Emmanuel (Verses 1-2)

Hymnal 56

Opening Prayer

Presider: O God of peace, you have taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be our strength: By the might of your Spirit lift us, we pray, to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

A Reading from the Book of Isaiah

Margaret Meyers

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these? He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing. Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, 'My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is dis-regarded 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. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He 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. (*Isaiah 40:1,25-31*)

Reader: The Word of the Lord

People: Thanks be to God.

(Silence is kept)

Psalm 121

Margaret Meyers

I lift up my eyes to the hills –
from where will my help come?

My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.

He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

The LORD is your keeper;
the LORD is your shade at your right hand.

The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.

The LORD will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.

The LORD will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time on and for evermore.

(Silence is kept.)

A Reading from the Gospel According to Matthew Margaret Meyers

‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’ *(Matthew 11:28-30)*

Reader: The Word of the Lord

***People:* Thanks be to God.**

(Silence is kept.)

Hymn

O Come, O Come Emmanuel

Hymnal 56

(Verses 6-7)

CANDLE LIGHTING

Reader 1: David Lujan, Jr.

Reader 2: Carol Foote

Reader 1: The first candle we light to remember those persons whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember their name, their voice, their face, the memory that binds them to us in this season. We hold them before God, giving thanks for their lives in ours.

(Silence is kept.)

Reader 2: We light the second candle for our grief, to remember the pain of loss: loss of relationships, loss of trust, loss of jobs, loss of health, loss of faith, the loss of joy. We acknowledge and embrace the pain of the past, O God, and we offer it to You, asking that into our wounded hearts and open hands You will place the gift of peace, shalom.

(Silence is kept.)

Reader 1: The third candle we light for our courage. We pause and remember the past weeks, months, and for some of us years, that have been heavy with our burdens. We give thanks for the gift of courage to confront our sorrow, to comfort one another, to share our feelings honestly and openly with each other, and to dare to hope in the midst of pain.

(Silence is kept.)

Reader 2: The fourth candle represents love. The love we have given, 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.

(Silence is kept.)

Reader 1: We light the fifth candle as a sign of hope, remembering that the light of Christ shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

(Silence is kept.)

Candle Lighting Chant

Wait for the Lord whose day is near

(People may come to the Altar and light a candle for the ones whom they remember.)



Wait for the Lord, his day is near.



Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart.

Prayers of the People

Charlene Martin

Loving God, We come before you in pain and sadness, with expectation and hope.
Give your grace to those who grieve, that they may find comfort in your presence and
be strengthened by your Spirit, we pray;

Response: **Hear us, O Lord of life.**

Receive into the arms of your mercy, to live in your gracious and eternal love, those
whom we love but see no longer;

Response: **Hear us, O Lord of life.**

Grant your grace to those who are sick; give courage and faith to all who are disabled
through injury or illness, we pray:

Response: **Hear us, O Lord of life.**

Strengthen those who endure continual pain and give them hope, we pray:

Response: **Hear us, O Lord of life.**

Grant to all who seek your guidance, and to all who are lonely, anxious, or
despondent, a knowledge of your will and an awareness of your presence;

Response: **Hear us, O Lord of life.**

Mend broken relationships, and restore those in emotional distress to soundness of
mind and serenity of spirit;

Response: **Hear us, O Lord of life.**

With you, O Lord, is the well of life:

Response: **And in your light we see light.**

The Lord's Prayer *(All together)*

**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, for ever and ever. Amen.**

Prayer for the Night *(All together)*

Lord, it is night.

**The night is for stillness.
Let us be still in the presence of God.**

**It is night after a long day.
What has been done has been done;
 what has not been done has not been done;
 let it be.**

**The night is dark.
Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of our own lives
 rest in you.**

**The night is quiet.
Let the quietness of your peace enfold us,
 all dear to us,
 and all who have no peace.**

**The night heralds the dawn.
Let us look expectantly to a new day,
 new joys,
 new possibilities.**

In your name we pray. Amen.

Collect *(Presider)*

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Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend to sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for your love's sake. Amen.

Blessing

Presider: *Let us go in peace.*

People: **Thanks be to God.**

The Service ends in silence to allow for further reflection as desired.

An Unending Love

We are loved by an unending love.

We are embraced by arms that find us
Even when we are hidden from ourselves.

We are touched by fingers that sooth us
Even when we are too proud for soothing.

We are counseled by voices that guide us
Even when we are too embittered to hear.

We are loved by an unending love.

We are supported by hands that uplift us
Even in the midst of a fall.

We are urged on by eyes that meet us
Even when we are too weak for meeting.

We are loved by an unending love.

Embraced, touched, soothed, and counseled,

Ours are the arms, the fingers, the voices;

Ours are the hands, the eyes, the smiles;

We are loved by an unending love.

By Rami M. Shapiro (b. 1951)

Acknowledgments: Inspired by the Blue Christmas 2022 Service, Washington National Cathedral, ... Wait for the Lord whose day is near Author: Communauté de Taizé. Prayer for the Night taken from A New Zealand Prayer Book—He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa', Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia. All rights reserved. Used by permission.