



"Weeping Mary" by Jackie Twedall, 2006.

Christ Church UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST

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**Milwaukee Metropolitan
Community Church**

a Vibrant ~ Inclusive ~ Progressive Community of Faith

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The Longest Night is a tradition in Western Christianity of inviting people to come together for a service around the time of the winter solstice when there are more hours of darkness than light. This is a time to come together for prayers and laments, to mourn the losses and griefs of the year, to let the tears flow for the hurting places in our own lives, as well as for our country and the world. This has been an exceedingly difficult year for everyone. Also known as a “Blue Christmas” tonight’s gathering is a safe and sacred space to share anguish, to plead with God to remember us, to pray for justice and restoration, even to hope against hope, through our doubts and tears and fears, that “God will set things right all over the earth.”

**Please recite the purple words aloud.*

Prelude

Words of Welcome

Good evening and welcome to Christ Church UCC and Milwaukee MCC’s Blue Christmas service. Tonight, is a night for us to be together in the dark. But so often darkness scares us. Darkness is our nightmare. We’ve been taught to fear it, to avoid it, to keep the lights on, to think happy thoughts, to pretend everything’s all right, and to not go into “that dark place” or the darkest valley. Yet we are here tonight in the dark because God created light and dark, day and night... and said both were *good*. To fear darkness is to miss what we can see there that we can’t see clearly anywhere else. So, here we are. We are in the dark. But we are not alone...

Opening Litany

One: Amid this season when we celebrate the hope of Christ’s coming, we come together to share our grief.

All: The Word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth.

One: During this season when we celebrate the peace that Christ brings, we come together to acknowledge our pain.

All: All who receive Christ are given the power to become children of God.

One: In the midst of this season when we celebrate the joy of Christ’s coming, we come together to name our fears.

All: What has come into being through Christ is life, and that life is the light of all people.

One: Amid this season when we celebrate the love that Christ brings, we come together to be upheld in our struggles.

All: The light shines in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it.

One: Let us worship Emmanuel, God with us, during all the celebration and sorrow of this season.

Lighting the Advent Candles

One: We light the first candle to share our grief: grief over loved ones who have died, over relationships that have ended, over the many kinds of loss we have experienced. May this candle bring light to our grief.

Silence

One: We light the second candle to acknowledge our pain: the pain of addiction; the pain of physical or mental illness; the pain of troubled relationships; the pain of depression. May this candle bring light to our pain.

Silence

One: We light the third candle to name our fears: fears of uncertainty, fears of being alone; fears of those who are not like us or whom we don't understand; fears of change or stagnation. May this candle bring light to our fears.

Silence

One: We light the fourth candle to recognize the struggles of our world: the struggles of those who suffer the effects of war, the struggles of those who need food and shelter; the struggles of those who are fighting to survive diseases and illnesses; the struggles of those who long for freedom from oppression; the struggles of those who are experiencing all that we have already named. May this candle bring to light our struggles.

Silence

Prayers and Laments

One: God of wisdom, we come to you this Christmas Season tired, in turmoil, and in pain. As the nights have grown longer, so has darkness grown and wrapped itself around our hearts. In this season of longer nights, we ask your healing blessings upon all that we carry in our hearts -- sorrow we fear may never end, wounds we cannot even put into words. Lord, hear our prayer,

All: And in Your merciful love, answer.

One: God of mercy and compassion, there are those among us who are grieving over what might have been. Death or loss or terrible hurt has changed our experience of Christmas. We remember that once it was a special day for us, too, but someone or something precious has gone away from us in this life. We have lost a beloved, a job, a goal, a cause, a dream. We find ourselves adrift and alone. We are weary from the journey, and we have found no room at the inn. We come to you seeking rest, and peace, and shelter from the storm. Lord, hear our prayer.

All: And in Your merciful love, answer.

One: God of grace, in the spirit of the season, grant us all that we need to comfort us as we journey through this Christmas season. We ask that you shelter and sustain all those of us, both here and throughout the world, who wander or want or weep or are heavy laden, that we may be lifted up in courage and journey on in Thy peace. Lord, hear our prayer.

All: And in Your merciful love, answer.

One: God of love, in this Christmas Season we embrace and offer up to you all that used to be which is now lost to us and cannot be again. With celebration all around us, memories of what was, and fears of what may be, weigh heavy on our hearts. Please hold us close in your embrace, be near to us this night, until the light returns and morning comes. Lord, hear our prayer,

All: And in Your merciful love, answer.

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

All: And in Your merciful love, answer.

One: Almighty God, we ask all of this through Jesus the Christ, who lives and reigns together with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Silence

Scriptures

Psalm 121

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 forevermore.

Isaiah 40: 1- 11

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. 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. 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." 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 forever. 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!" See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. 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.

John 1: 1- 17

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. 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. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' ") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Lighting of the Christ Candle

All: In the midst of what we share, we acknowledge and name, God is with us. We light this candle to remember that God has come and is coming into the world. The light that is the life of all people shines, here and now, among us.

Closing Prayer

One: Holy One, in the midst of this season we seek your comfort. Speak to us words that calm our souls, touch our hearts, and open our eyes to your presence. In the dark places of our lives, shine your light. Remind us that in all times you remain with us. Move among us now: comforting, strengthening, renewing, and encouraging. Help us to know that our pain and hurt are okay; that they are simply a part of being human. Then give us your healing touch. Healing for our souls, our spirits, and our deepest selves. For we pray in the name of Jesus the Light, Amen.

Silent Night

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