

## **Blue Christmas**

Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd  
Asheboro, NC

**Blue Christmas** is held at 5:00pm on the Winter Solstice each year, as a “longest night” service.

It is advertised: “Are you going through a hard time this holiday season? Do you know someone who has lost a loved one, is struggling with unemployment, addiction, health problems, or anything else that makes celebrating Christmas this year particularly difficult? Join us at sundown on this longest night of the year, for a gentle candlelit communion service especially for those who are lonely, stressed, or grieving this holiday season. Periods of silence and contemplative music will help us to be still in the presence of the One who holds all our joys and all our sorrows, promising to walk with us even in our darkest hours. All are welcome!”

Pieces of this liturgy were pulled from a service called “Sanctuary” that was developed by The Rev. Joe Mitchell and The Very Rev. Carol Wade at Christ Church Cathedral in Lexington, KY.

### Setup

There is no entering procession; the minister and musician are already seated as people enter. Lighting is dim with tealight candles used. Pads of paper and pens/pencils are provided in each pew. A bowl of sand with four large taper candles is set up in the center of the room, along with several smaller taper candles.

### Music

Kristen Leigh Mitchell arranges and leads the music, which is led mostly by the guitar and sung slowly and softly. During the welcome, the people are instructed that they are welcome to sing along or that they can just listen. With the exception of the closing hymn, the people will remain seated during the songs at this service. The verses of “O Come O Come Emmanuel” sung during the litany are accompanied by a shruti box (drone). “Day Is Done” is written by Scottish Jesuit priest James Quinn and the musical arrangement is composed by Kristen. The closing version of “Joy to the World” is sung a cappella with a shruti box (drone) and tambourine accompaniment by Kristen as she and Joe process out.

# *Blue Christmas*



*The Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd*

*5:00 pm*

Please enter the space quietly.

## Welcome

A brief period of silence is kept.

## Poem

*Wild Geese* by Mary Oliver

## Opening Song

*O Little Town of Bethlehem*

All stand, as able, at the sound of the bowl ring.

*Presider*

Come Holy Spirit.

*People*

**And dwell among us.**

*Presider*

Be our light in the darkness

*People*

**And guide us into the way of peace.**

*Presider*

Let us pray.

God of mercy, we pray for ourselves, for our families, and for all those who live with painful experiences of loss. We ask for strength for today, peace for the past, and courage for tomorrow; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord, who entered the world at Christmas to share our life in sorrow and joy, despair and hope, death and new birth. **Amen.**

All are seated.

## The Reading

*John 1: 1-14*

*After the Reading:*

*Minister*

Here what the Spirit is saying to God's people.

*People*

**Thanks be to God**

## Reflection

## Music for Meditation

*In the Bleak Midwinter*

*During the music, you are invited to write the names of those who have been lost or your experiences of loss and pain, as well as hope, that are weighing on your hearts and minds. Later, you will be invited to come forward and place those written prayers in the offering basket to be blessed as part of our celebration of Holy Communion.*

## A Litany of Remembrance

*All stand at the sound of the bowl ring.*

*The first candle is lit.*

*Presider* We light this first candle to remember those persons who have been loved and lost. We pause to remember their names, their faces, their voices. We give thanks for the memory that binds them to us in this season that anticipates Christ.

*People* **May God's eternal love surround them.**

*Silence is kept.*

*The Minister leads the first verse.*

**O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,  
that mourns in lowly exile here, until the Son of God appear.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

*The second candle is lit.*

*Presider* We light this second candle to redeem the pain of loss; the loss of relationships, the loss of health, the loss of jobs, and the loss of financial security. As we gather up the pain of the past, we offer it to you, O God, asking that you place the gift of peace into our open hearts and hands.

*People* We give thanks for your light that shines upon us and within us.  
**Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into your future.**

*Silence is kept.*

*The Minister leads the second verse.*

**O come, our Wisdom from on high, who ordered all things mightily.  
To us the path of knowledge show, and teach us in Her ways to go.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

*The third candle is lit.*

*Presider* We light this third candle to remember ourselves at Christmas time. We remember the past weeks, months, and for some of us, years of difficult times. We pause to remember the poignancy of the memories, the grief, the sadness, the hurt, and the pain that reflects our mortality. We give thanks for the love that surrounds us on every side.

*People* **Help us remember that dawn defeats the darkness.**

*Silence is kept.*

*The Minister leads the third verse.*

**O come, O rod of Jesse's stem, from every foe deliver them.  
That trust your mighty power to save, bring them in vict-ry through the  
grave.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

*The fourth candle is lit.*

*Presider* We light this fourth candle to remember the gift of faith and hope that God offers to us in the Christmas story. We pause to remember that God in Christ, who shares our life, promises us a place and a time of no more pain and suffering. We give thanks that you walk with us in every season of life.

*People* **Let us remember the One who shows the way and walks with us through every journey of our lives.**

*Silence is kept.*

*The Minister leads the fourth verse.*

**O come, desire of nations bind, in one the hearts of all humankind;  
O bid our sad divisions cease, and be yourself the Prince of Peace.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

*All are seated.*

### **Music & Candlelighting**

*Day Is Done*

*During the music you are welcome to come forward and light a candle as a symbol of your prayer. You may deposit your written prayers in the offering basket.*

### **Prayers for Ourselves & Others**

*All stand at the sound of the bowl ring.*

*Presider* In this season of light, let us pray for those who wait in darkness.

*Presider* Glorious God, we remember your mighty deeds across the ages, the times you saved us and brought us home. Yet we also remember the times when we felt alone and afraid. Receive these prayers from your faithful people. Give them strength and courage to meet the days ahead.

*People* **Look upon us with your shining face, especially in our time of need.**

*Presider* Redeeming God, we remember those who are oppressed by poverty and discrimination, by political upheaval and dangerous rulers.

*People* **Right what is wrong among us and within us, and restore us to you, to others, and to ourselves.**

*Presider* Healing God, make the brokenhearted whole again; comfort those who mourn; repair our ruined cities; fill the hungry with good things.

*People* **In all the tossing and turning of our days, do not let us lose sight of you or those whom you came to serve.**

*Presider* Holy God, in the stillness of this night, we give thanks for the Light no darkness can overcome, for you are faithful and mighty to save.

*People* **Light of the world, live among us, full of grace and truth.**

*Presider* In all of our beginnings and in our endings, may we be one with you eternally, through Christ, and in the unity of the Holy Spirit, we praise you almighty God, now and forever **Amen.**

*Presider* The Peace of the Lord be always with you.

*People* **And also with you.**

*The Ministers and People greet one another in the name of the Lord and are seated.*

### Offertory Music

*What Child Is This*

### The Holy Communion

*All stand at the sound of the bowl ring.*

*Presider* The Lord be with you.

*People* **And also with you.**

*Presider* Lift up your hearts.

*People* **We lift them to the Lord.**

*Presider* Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

*People* **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

*Presider* How can we thank you, God? For sun, moon, and stars, for breath and life and all things good, for the birth of Jesus, who seeks us out to call us home and forever sing your praise. And so with saints and angels and all creation we join together in proclaiming the never-ending song of heaven:

*All sing the Sanctus.*

Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, God of power and might, —  
heaven and earth are full of your glo-ry. Ho - san - na in the high - est.  
Bless-ed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. — Ho -  
san - na in the high - est. Ho - san - na in the high - est.

*The People stand or kneel as the Presider recalls God's work in creation and humanity's fall from God.*

*After recalling Christ's Last Supper, the Presider and People proclaim the Memorial Acclamation.*

*Presider* This is our story.

*People* **This is our song.**

*The Presider prays that the gifts and People may be blessed and sanctified by God. When the Presider concludes the prayer, the People loudly respond, "AMEN!"*

*Presider* And now let us pray together the prayer that Jesus taught us.

*All* **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.**

*The Presider breaks the consecrated Bread. A period of silence follows.*

*Presider* We break this bread to share in the Body of Christ.

*People* **We who are many are one Body, for we all share in the one Bread.**

*The Presider invites the People to the Holy Table, where all are welcome to receive the Communion of Our Lord. If you do not wish to receive, please come forward for a blessing. Gluten-free wafers are available upon request.*

### **Music During Communion**

*Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence*

*When all have received, the Presider returns to the Holy Table. All stand at the sound of the bowl ring.*

*Presider* Let us pray.

*People* **Loving God, we thank you for the birth of Jesus, for his love, his life, his death, and his resurrection. We thank you for this holy meal and pray that it will strengthen us and fill us with your goodness. Gather into your arms all the people of the world, so that we might share your good news of peace with your children everywhere; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

*The Presider offers a blessing, and the People respond, 'Amen.'*

Joy to the world! The Lord has come: let earth receive her king;  
Let every heart prepare him room,  
And heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing,  
And heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground;  
He comes to make his blessings flow  
Far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found,  
Far as, far as, the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove  
The glories of his righteousness,  
And wonders of his love, and wonders of his love  
And wonders, wonders of his love.

*Presider* Let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord.  
*People* Thanks be to God.

*The Ministers and People exit quietly.*

*Participants in the Liturgy*

*Presider*

The Rev. Joe T. Mitchell

*Minister of the Word & Music*

Kristen Leigh Mitchell