BLUE CHRISTMAS SERVICE

WELCOME:

Welcome to this Blue Christmas Service. Because you have all come to a service with this title you must have some thoughts about what a Blue Christmas is. Some will remember Elvis Presley's song, "I'll have a Blue Christmas without You." And though our own feelings about a Blue Christmas won't be wrapped up in Elvis' words, the song does say, "When those blue snowflakes start falling, that's when those blue memories start calling." And blue memories are why we gather here. Would some of you like to give us a word or short phrase that comprises what a Blue Christmas means to you?

(These could be written on an easel or in some way recorded for use later.)

We are about to experience the shortest day and the longest night of the year. We know what it feels like to be in darkness. Others have called it "the dark night of the soul," or "the winter of our discontent." This time of year can bring back memories of past pain and sorrow. It highlights and heightens new experiences of suffering. For many this time of year, that we call the holiday season, is no holiday at all. It is filled with difficult times, humps to get over, gatherings to endure, varieties of pressures and a flood of memories that darken and dampen the days. This service will allow for some time to recognize that this season is not a joy for everyone. When others are going "merrily along" many of us would rather the season just go away.

In this service, we will be given a chance to sing and to pray. We will be invited to offer up the pain, the loneliness, the sad and dark memories, and the anxiety and fear to the one whose birth we eagerly await…Jesus Christ. We pray that you will find hope and peace in this service and comfort in knowing that you are not alone.

OPENING PRAYER:

Dear Heavenly Father, we come to you tonight to acknowledge the "blue feelings" we are having at this Christmas time. Sometimes we even feel guilty because we have these feelings. The world tells us it is supposed to be a time of joy and celebration and yet it can be some of the darkest times for us. We offer up to you all those things we are feeling and all the situations that worry us and ask that you heal our pains and remove the loneliness. Help us to recognize the pressures of the season that drag us into the darkness and turn them over to you.

Congregation: Amen. We wait upon the Lord.

Blue Christmas Service
November 2009
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OPENING HYMN “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

Psalm 77 from The Message translation by Eugene Peterson

read---with readers and by congregation responsively
readers stationed individually around the sanctuary

Congregation
I yell out to my God, I yell with all my might, I yell at the top of my lungs.

First Reader
He listens.

Second Reader
I found myself in trouble and went looking for my Lord;
my life was an open wound that wouldn’t heal.
When friends said, “Everything will turn out all right,”
I didn’t believe a word they said.

Third Reader
I remember God—and shake my head.
I bow my head—then wring my hands.
I’m awake all night—not a wink of sleep;
I can’t even say what is bothering me.

First Reader
I go over the days one by one,
I ponder the years gone by.
I strum my lute all through the night,
wondering how to get my life together.

Congregation
Will the Lord walk off and leave us for good?
Will he never smile again?
Is his love worn threadbare?
Has his salvation promise burned out?

Second Reader
Has God forgotten his manners?
Has he angrily stalked off and left us?

Third Reader
“Just my luck,” I said.
“The High God goes out of business just the moment I need him.”

First Reader
Once again I’ll go over what God has done,
lay out on the table the ancient wonders;
I’ll ponder all the things you’ve accomplished,
and give a long, loving look at your acts.

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Congregation
O God! Your way is holy!
No god is great like God!
You're the God who makes things happen;
you showed everyone what you can do—

Second Reader
You pulled your people out of the worst kind of trouble,
rescued the children of Jacob and Joseph.

Third Reader
Ocean saw you in action, God,
saw you and trembled with fear;
Deep Ocean was scared to death.

Congregation
Clouds belched buckets of rain,
Sky exploded with thunder,
your arrows flashing this way and that.

First Reader
From Whirlwind came your thundering voice,
Lightning exposed the world,
Earth reeled and rocked.

Second Reader
You strode right through Ocean,
walked straight through roaring Ocean,
but nobody saw you come or go.

Congregation and Readers
Hidden in the hands of Moses and Aaron,
You led your people like a flock of sheep.
Now, lead us O God. Lead us into this season of hope and promise.

HYMN "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus"

A SHARING:

The sharing of a personal Blue Christmas story.
Or have someone read an appropriate story (Suggestions below. Some of them are short—perhaps time will allow a couple to be read.).

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Candle Lighting

Candles are lit from a larger main candle.

The first candle is lit—

We light this first candle in memory of those persons we have lost through death. We remember them by name in our hearts or out loud. (pause)

We give thanks for them and for their lives. (pause)

We treasure the memories in this difficult season .

[Silence]

The second candle is lit—

We light this second candle to ask for deliverance from the pain of loss. All of the losses we face that bring sadness and darkness to this time of year--the loss of relationships, the loss of health, the loss of jobs, the loss of financial security…. (pause)

We ask that God bring us comfort. We realize that the pain of loss can be heightened at this time of year and we ask for peace and renewal. (pause)

Lord, thank you for release.

[Silence]

The third candle is lit—

We light this third candle for each of us. We offer up to God our pasts, the times of regret and sorrow, the times of mourning, the difficult memories, the times of grief and sadness, and of loneliness and pain. (pause)

We ask that God take away the darkness. (pause)

"…the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned." Matthew 4: 16

[Silence]

The fourth candle is lit—

We light this fourth candle as a symbol of hope and promise. We invite and celebrate the coming of the One who promises us no more suffering…the One who promises us light. (pause)

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"…Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.

[Silence]

Amen. Come Lord Jesus.

People are invited to come forward and to light a votive from the main candle. They may immediately return to their seats or stay for an anointing with oil and a laying on of hands.

Soft music playing.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Most Gracious Heavenly Father, at the beginning of this service we shared those things that cause us to call this time of year a Blue Christmas. We now offer all of them up to you (perhaps they could be read off the list). Please attend to all these needs.
Lord in Your Mercy.
Hear our prayer.

Compassionate God, we ask that you free us from the darkness that traps us in our sadness. We ask the words be spoken even when we cannot express them ourselves. Our experience of Christmas has been changed because of a death or loss or physical or mental illness. We used to look forward to this time of year, too, but now we only feel like we are outside looking in on the joy. Bring back the joy.
Lord in Your Mercy
Hear our prayer.

The holiday season reminds us of what used to be. But the celebration of Your Son's birth…the real Christmas…reminds us of hope and promise. Please be near us this night.
Lord in Your Mercy
Hear our prayer.

BENEDICTION Which could include encouragement to light the votives at home during prayer or devotion time.

HYMN: Silent Night, Holy Night

You are invited to stay as long as you like in the sanctuary for prayer.

A time of fellowship following the service is recommended.
Perhaps there can be designated persons to spend individual time with others and to offer prayer.

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Suggested Readings for the Sharing Time:

1) By Charles Swindol, *The Finishing Touch* as recorded in *The Glory of Christmas; Word* Publishing, 1996, pg. 9. ISBN: 0-8499-5273-5

Christmas comes each year to draw people in from the cold.

Like tiny frightened sparrows, shivering in the winter cold, many live their lives on barren branches of heartbreak, disappointment, and loneliness, lost in thoughts of shame, self-pity, guilt or failure. One blustery day follows another, and the only company they keep is with fellow-strugglers who land on the same branches, confused and unprotected.

We try so hard to attract them to the warmth. Week after week church bells ring. Choirs sing. Preachers preach. Lighted churches send out their beacon. But nothing seems to bring in those who need warmth the most.

Then, as the year draws to a close, Christmas offers its wonderful message. Emmanuel. God with us. He who resided in Heaven, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Spirit, willingly descended into our world. He breathed our air, felt our pain, knew our sorrows, and died for our sins. He didn't come to frighten us, but to show us the way to warmth and safety.

2) By Charles Swindol, *The Finishing Touch* as recorded in *The Glory of Christmas; Word* Publishing, 1996, pg. 54. ISBN: 0-8499-5273-5

From a distance, we dazzle; up close, we're tarnished. Put enough of us together and we may resemble an impressive mountain range. But when you get down into the shadowy crevices…the Alps we ain't.

That's why our Lord means so much to us. He is intimately acquainted with all our ways. Darkness and light are alike to him. Not one of us is hidden from his sight. All things are open and laid bare before him: our darkest secret, our deepest shame, our stormy past, our worst thought, our hidden motive, our vilest imagination…even our vain attempts to cover the ugly with snow-white beauty.

He comes up so close. He sees it all. He knows our frame. He remembers we are dust. BEST OF ALL, HE LOVES US STILL.

3) By Max Lucado, *The Applause of Heaven,* as recorded in *The Glory of Christmas;* Word Publishing, 1996, pg. 143. ISBN: 0-8499-5273-5

A small cathedral outside Bethlehem marks the supposed birthplace of Jesus. Behind a high altar in the church is a cave, a little cavern lit by silver lamps.

You can enter the main edifice and admire the ancient church. You can also enter the quiet cave where a star embedded in the floor recognizes the birth of the King. There is one stipulation, however. You have to stoop. The door is so low you can't go in standing up.

The same is true of the Christ. You can see the world standing tall, but to witness the Savior, you have to get on your knees.

4) By Max Lucado, *The Applause of Heaven,* as recorded in *The Glory of Christmas;* Word Publishing, 1996, pg. 59. ISBN: 0-8499-5273-5

As long as Jesus is one of many options, he is no option.

As long as you can carry your burdens alone, you don't need a burden bearer. As long as your situation brings you no grief, you will receive no comfort. And as long as you can take him or leave him, you might as well leave him, because he won't be taken half-heartedly.

But when you mourn, when you get to the point of sorrow for your sins, when you admit that you have no other option but to cast all your cares on him, and when there is truly no other name that you can call, then cast all your cares on him, for he is waiting in the midst of the storm.

5) By Max Lucado, *In the Grip of Grace,* as recorded in *The Glory of Christmas;* World Publishing, 1996, pg. . ISBN: 0-8499-5273-5

God is for you. Turn to the sidelines; that's God cheering your run. Look past the finish line; that's God applauding your steps. Listen for him in the bleachers, shouting your name. Too tired to continue? He'll carry you. Too discouraged to fight? He's picking you up. God is for you.

God is for you. Had he a calendar, your birthday would be circled. If he drove a car, your name would be on his bumper. If there's a tree in heaven, he's carved your name in the bark…

“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne?” God asks in Isaiah 49:15 (NIV). What a bizarre question. Can you mothers imagine feeding your infant and then later asking, “What was that baby’s name?” No. I’ve seen you care for your young. You stroke the hair, you touch the face, you sing the name over and over. Can a mother forget? No way. But “even if she could forget,…I will not forget you, “God pledges (Isaiah 49:15)

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