

Blue Christmas: A Service of Night Prayer for the Winter Solstice

Introduction

The introduction may be printed in a worship folder or spoken by a leader.

The winter solstice is the longest night and the beginning of winter in the northern hemisphere.

In a few days many of us will gather to celebrate the Nativity of Our Lord, the arrival of Jesus Christ, God in human form. December 25 is celebrated as Christmas because it had been incorrectly identified as the winter solstice. What the early Christians intended for this feast was not a birthday party for baby Jesus but rather a feast of proclamation. God arrives by way of deep darkness. Christians wanted to tell the world that God, the maker of the cosmos, chose to lovingly draw near to our broken world by way of a human birth on the longest night of the year. God's love for us goes deep and does not fade or change with the seasons. It is a richer and plentiful darkness, bountiful like the noonday sun of late June.

The weight of depression grows heavier when light is scarce. We get stressed out when our calendars fill with extra social obligations. We fear interactions with family members that have been difficult in the past. What an opportunity, then, to share that the message of Christmas is specifically sent for those in pain and suffering. It is not that "all is merry and bright." Rather, it is the abiding truth that God seeks to be with us, even when we are "blue."

While it is true that our preindustrial forebears had legitimate reasons to be afraid of the dark, it is also true that we repeat racist binaries that have led to the violent deaths of people of color when Christians associate darkness with pain and lightness with healing. A night like this and a feast like Christmas are fruitful encounters with healing darkness. God-with-us is here to guide us into paths of love and practices of justice.

Opening

The assembly gathers in silence. A chime or bell may announce the beginning of the service.

Gathering Hymn

Wait for the Lord ELW 262

In silence we wait SP 17

Greeting

The life of our Lord Jesus Christ, the seasons of God,
and the hope of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

Thanksgiving for the Seasons of life.

The assembly is seated.

Silence.

P: God be with you.

C: And also, with you.

P: Let us give thanks to God.

C: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

P: We give you thanks, O creator, for in the beginning you called cycles into being, and you set night and day into motion. In a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night you led your people into freedom. Guide our way through the seasons of life, oh Christ; may your Word be guidance through our journeys; for you are merciful, and you love your whole creation, and with all your creatures we give you glory, through your Son Jesus Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

Prayer

Creator of the stars of night,
bless the long hours of this night
with the warmth of your presence.
Come to all who suffer in any way.
Grant rest to the weary,
freedom to those who are burdened,
and hope to those who despair.
Strengthen us as we await your coming once again,
through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

Reading

Isaiah 50:10

Song

O God, we call ACS 1075

Comfort, comfort now my people ELW 256

Reading

Exodus 20:21

Song

In silence we wait ACS 998

Deep peace SP 7

Reflection

A spoken homily is offered, followed by silence for reflection.

Prayer

A leader may prepare intercessions or lead the assembly in a form of contemplative prayer. Tactile prayer stations may be set up around the worship space, such as votive candles, cards, or smooth stones. This contemplative time may be accompanied by singing or instrumental music. A chime may call the assembly to prayer, then the songs are sung meditatively. During this time, worshipers may light a candle and place it in a sand-filled container; write a prayer concern on a slip of paper and place it in a designated area; or kneel, sit, or stand for individual prayer. Prayer with laying on of hands and anointing may be offered by prayer ministers to worshipers who desire this form of healing prayer (see Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 277).

Lord God, when we walk through the darkest valley, you are with us. Grant that your servants who seek your face in times of trouble may see your goodness in this time, and that we may be set safely on the rock of our faith, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

Silence.

Hymn of Darkness

During the hymn, worshipers may light candles or pray in a prayer station.

Joyful Is the Dark

ACS 1096

Lord's Prayer**Silence**

Prayer is followed with silence, which is concluded with a bell or chime.

Blessing

May God bless you and keep you.

May God's holy darkness enfold you and grant you rest.

May God nourish a seed of hope among us.

Amen.

Song

Though the earth shall change ACS 1035

Nothing can trouble / Nada te turbe ACS 1033

Wait for the Lord ELW 262

Dismissal

The peace of Christ be with you all.

And also with you.

Greetings of peace may be shared as the assembly departs.