

St. Francis in the Valley Episcopal Church
600 South La Cañada Drive, Green Valley, AZ 85614

BLUE CHRISTMAS SERVICE

*Please join us in prayerful meditation before the service.
We ask that you turn off all cell phones, pagers,
and other electronic devices.*

THE GATHERING OF THE PEOPLE

Please stand as the ministers enter.

Rector: Welcome to St. Francis in the Valley Episcopal Church and to this Blue Christmas Service. We gather with others today to acknowledge the 'blue' feelings we may have at Christmas time, the reasons for them, and offer it all up to God. Soon it will be the shortest day of the year and the longest night, and certain memorable phrases come to mind, such as: “the long dark night of the soul,” and “the winter of our discontent,” in which memories of our past experiences and the pain or emptiness of present ones can be overwhelming.

For some, Christmas Day is the most difficult; for others, Christmas Eve, or New Year's Eve, or the beginning of another lonely New Year. In this service we'll sing some hymns appropriate to the Christmas season, while recognizing that this is not a season of joy for everyone. We invite you to reflect on the sadness, the pain, the loneliness you may feel and unburden it onto our great sign of hope, the Christ Child. And we pray that you will find comfort and hope in knowing that you are not alone.

Officiant: Light and peace, in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

Officiant: If I say, “Surely the darkness will cover me, and the light around me turn to night,” darkness is not dark to you, O Lord; the night is as bright as the day; darkness and light to you are both alike. (*Psalms 139:10-11*)

The Officiant continues: Lighten our darkness, we beseech you, O Lord, and by your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of your only Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

People: Amen.

Officiant: Together let us pray:

O Gracious Light,
pure brightness of the everliving Father in heaven,
O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed!
Now as we come to the setting of the sun,
and our eyes behold the vesper light,
we sing your praises, O God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices,
O Son of God, O Giver of life,
and to be glorified through all the worlds.

THE COLLECT FOR ADVENT

Rector: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Rector: Let us pray.

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

People: Amen.

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

Please be seated for the reading of God's word.

Lector: A Reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah (9:2, 6-7)

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore.

Lector: The Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

Please stand as you are able for the singing of the hymn: O little town of Bethlehem (#79)

O little town of Bethlehem,
how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
the silent stars go by;
yet in thy dark streets shineth
the everlasting Light;
the hopes and fears of all the years
are met in thee tonight.

How silently, how silently,
the wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
the blessings of his heaven.
No ear may hear his coming,
but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him still
the dear Christ enters in.

Where children pure and happy
pray to the blessèd Child,
where misery cries out to thee,
Son of the mother mild;
where charity stands watching
and faith holds wide the door,
the dark night wakes, the glory breaks,
and Christmas comes once more.

Please remain standing.

Deacon: The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke (2:8-20)

People: Glory to you, Lord Christ.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” When the angels had left them and gone

into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about the child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Deacon: The Gospel of the Lord.

People: Praise to you, Lord Christ.

CANDLE LIGHTING LITANY OF REMEMBRANCE

Please be seated.

Lector: We light the first Advent candle to remember those persons who have been loved and lost. We remember their names, their faces, their voices. And we give thanks for the memories that bind them to us in this season before Christmas.

People: May God's eternal love surround them.

You may name them aloud, or silently in your heart.

Hymn: *Silent night, holy night (#111, v.1)*

Silent night, holy night,
all is calm, all is bright
round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy infant, so tender and mild,
sleep in heavenly peace.
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Lector: We light the second candle to redeem the pain of loss: the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, the loss of financial resources, the loss of health, the loss of faith. As we gather up the pain of the past, we offer it to you, O God, asking that into our open hands, you will place the gift of peace.

People: Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into your future.

Silent night, holy night,
griefs abound, now in sight,
Jesus comes in manger bare,
holds our loved ones in his holy care.
Joy, at last, to be ours.
Joy, at last, to be ours.

Lector: We light the third candle to remember ourselves this Christmas time. We pause and remember the past weeks, months, and for some of us even years of down times. We acknowledge the poignancy of memories, the grief, the hurts, the sadness, and the pain of reflecting on our own mortality.

People: Let us remember that dawn defeats darkness.

Silent night, holy night,
shepherds quake at the sight,
glories stream from heaven afar,
heavenly hosts sing alleluia;
Christ, the Savior, is born!
Christ, the Savior, is born!

Lector: The fourth candle is lit to remember our faith and the gift of hope which God offers to us in the Christmas story. We remember that God, who shares our life, promises us a place and time of no more pain and suffering.

People: Let us remember the One who shows the way and who goes with us into our tomorrow.

Silent night, holy night,
Son of God, loves pure light
radiant beams from thy holy face,
with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

INVITATION TO INDIVIDUAL PRAYER

Officiant: Each one of us brings to this service the life experiences that shape our thoughts, feelings, and perspectives in the present time. Some of those might be stress-filled, depressing, anxious, and even painful. Too often we carry these burdens alone. At this time we offer an opportunity to share these burdens with the assistance of prayer. As meditative music is played in the background, you are invited to approach, one by one, light a candle for your intention and, if you wish, go to any one of the four clergy that we may give you support through prayer. For those of you viewing from home, I invite you to offer your own prayers to the One who is the Light of the World.

Music for Reflection

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Please stand as you are able.

Deacon: In the spirit of this season, let us now ask God for what we need for ourselves as people coping with loss, pain, suffering, loneliness, grief, and sadness. In response to the words, “Loving God, hear our prayer,” you are invited to respond with “And in your merciful love, answer us.”

Lord God, as Christmas draws near we come to you with pain growing inside us. As the nights have been growing longer, so has the darkness wrapped itself around our hearts. In this season of long nights, we offer you the pain in our hearts, the trauma that some of us cannot put into words. Loving God, hear our prayer.

People: And in your merciful love, answer us.

Deacon: Compassionate God, there are those among us who are grieving over what might have been. A death or loss has changed our experience of Christmas. Once it was a special day for us too, but someone has died or moved away. Or we have lost a job, or a cause. We find ourselves adrift, alone, bereft. Lord help us find our way. Loving God, hear our prayer.

People: And in your merciful love, answer us.

Deacon: The Christmas season reminds us of all that used to be and cannot be anymore. The memories of what was, the fears of what may be, stifle us. All around us we hear the sounds of celebration. But all we experience is a sense of feeling blue. Please be near us this night. Loving God, hear our prayer.

People: And in your merciful love, answer us.

Deacon: I invite you to offer your own intercessions and thanksgivings, either silently or aloud. *(Pause)*

The Deacon continues: O God of love who walks with us through all the seasons of life, grant us a sense of your timing. In this season of short days and long nights, teach us the lessons of new beginnings, that such waitings and endings may become a starting place, a planting of seeds which bring to birth what is ready to be born – something right and just and different, a new song, a deeper relationship, a fuller love – in the fullness of your time. We ask this through Christ, our Lord.

People: Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Officiant: Let us pray together as Jesus taught us.

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 *(from the New Zealand Prayer Book)*

Officiant: 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 those 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.

People: Amen.

THE BLESSING

Rector: May Christ, who by his Incarnation gathered things earthly and heavenly into one, fill you with his joy and peace; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you this day and remain with you always.

People: Amen.

Hymn: *It came upon the midnight clear* (#90)

It came upon the midnight clear,
that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth
to touch their harps of gold:
“Peace on the earth, good will to men,
from heaven's all-gracious King.”
The world in solemn stillness lay
to hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come
with peaceful wings unfurled,
and still their heavenly music floats
o'er all the weary world;
above its sad and lowly plains
they bend on hovering wing,
and ever o'er its Babel-sounds
the blessed angels sing.

THE DISMISSAL

Deacon: Go forth in the name of the promised Christ.

People: Thanks be to God.

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PARTICIPANTS IN THE SERVICE

Rector: The Very Rev. Dr. Warren Leibovitch

Acolyte: Joyce Davison

Officiant: The Rev. Judith Turberg

Lector: The Rev. Tom Neyland

Deacon: The Rev. Becky Williamson

Organist: Sophia Witte

Greeters: Chris and Ginny Arundell

Audio/Video: Tom and Gloria Cadwalader