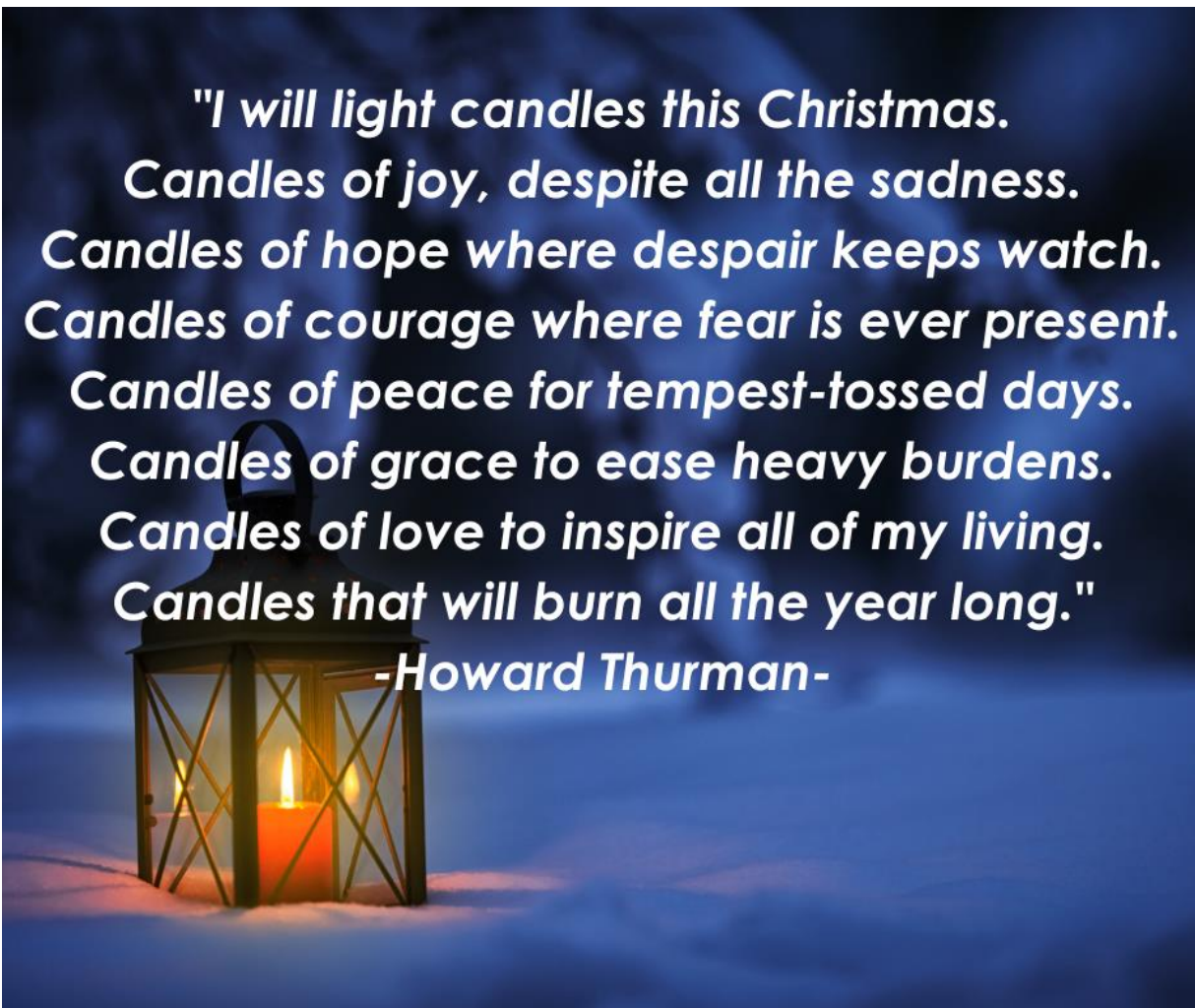


Blue Christmas

Community United Methodist Church

December 14, 2023



*"I will light candles this Christmas.
Candles of joy, despite all the sadness.
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch.
Candles of courage where fear is ever present.
Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days.
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens.
Candles of love to inspire all of my living.
Candles that will burn all the year long."*

-Howard Thurman-

Call to Worship

Leader: ...and this life was the light of the world.

People: The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Hymn

(What Child is This, #219)

1. What child is this who, laid to rest,
on Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
while shepherds watch are keeping?

Refrain:

This, this is Christ the King,
whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
haste, haste to bring him laud,
the babe, the son of Mary.

2. Why lies he in such mean estate
where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christians, fear, for sinners here
the silent Word is pleading. (Refrain)

3. So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh,
come, peasant, king, to own him;
the King of kings salvation brings,
let loving hearts enthrone him. (Refrain)

Psalm 22

(All read the boldface verses together.)

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me, so far from the words of my groaning?
**O my God, I cry by day but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.**
In you, our ancestors trusted. They trusted and you delivered them.
**It was you who brought me from the womb,
you who kept me safe on my mother's breast.**

Since my mother bore me, you have been my God.

Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

God does not despise the affliction of the afflicted.

God does not hide from me.

When I cry to God, God hears me.

Thanks be to God.

Lighting of Blue Candles

Blue Candle #1 – Acknowledging anxiety and fear.

Leader: ...Thank you Lord for permission to lean into you for strength.

All: Our regrets keep us in the past, our fears keep us from being awake to your love in this moment, and our worries take away joy in the present. When we are lost in fear and anxiety, you continually offer calm and care. Help us breath your love in deeply right now, bringing peace to our worries and fears.

Psalm 46:1-2 The Voice (VOICE)

¹ God is our shelter and our strength.

When troubles seem near, God is nearer, and He's ready to help.

So why run and hide?

² No fear, *no pacing, no biting fingernails.*

When the earth spins out of control, *we are sure and fearless.*

When mountains crumble and the waters run wild, *we are sure and fearless.*

Reader: Lift up any worries and fears you have to the Lord during this time of silent reflection. Let him bring you peace and comfort.

Time of Silent Reflection

Blue Candle #2 – Acknowledging loss, pain and hurt.

Leader: ... You will place the gift of healing.

All: We seek healing in body, mind, spirit and relationships. We remember through You all things are possible. Refresh, restore, renew us, O God. Through your gift of healing grace bring us to a place of hope and confidence as your beloved children.

Psalm 34:17-18 The Voice (VOICE)

¹⁷ When the upright *need help and cry* to the Eternal, He hears *their cries* and rescues them from all of their troubles.

¹⁸ When someone is hurting or brokenhearted, the Eternal moves in close and revives him in his pain.

Reader: In this time of silent reflection, cry out to God your hurts and pains with open hearts and hands to receive God's healing touch.

Time of Silent Reflection

Blue Candle #3 – Acknowledging loneliness and depression.

Leader: ... Sometimes, we feel disconnected and the dark seems overwhelming.

All: Though the night is dark, with the turning of the earth the dawn will come, and dawn defeats the darkness. It reminds us the light of Christ shines through the darkness and we are never alone. Thank you Lord for defeating the darkness and for the promise of never leaving us.

Psalm 40:1-2 The Voice (VOICE)

¹ I waited a long time for the Eternal;

He *finally* knelt down to hear me.

He listened to my *weak and whispered* cry.

² He reached down and drew me

from the deep, dark hole where I was *stranded*, mired in the muck and clay.

With a gentle hand, He pulled me out

To set me down safely on a *warm* rock;

He held me until I was steady enough to continue the journey again.

Reader: During this time of silence, pour out your loneliness to God. If you are comfortable, put a hand on the person's shoulder beside you. Remember you are not alone. You are loved and you belong.

Time of Silent Reflection

Blue Candle #4 – Acknowledging grief and mourning.

Leader: ...when all Creation waits for the Light.

All: We remember them with love. May God's eternal love surround them. May God wrap us in comfort and love as we grieve and remember. May we find hope in the love shared and the love that lives on today.

Psalm 23:1-4, The Eternal is my shepherd, He cares for me always.

² He provides me rest in rich, green fields

beside streams of refreshing water.

He soothes my fears;

³ He makes me whole again,

steering me *off worn, hard paths*

to roads where *truth and* righteousness echo His name.

⁴ Even in the *unending* shadows of death's darkness,

I am not overcome by fear.

Because You are with me *in those dark moments*,

near with Your protection and guidance,

I am comforted.

Time of Silent Reflection

The Prayers of the People

Leader: 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 longest night, 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.

Leader: 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.

Leader: 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.

Leader: 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.

Leader: Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your 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 your love's sake. Amen.

Special Music

(In the Bleak Midwinter)

Third Reading: Luke 2:4-9

⁴⁻⁵ Mary's fiancé Joseph, from Nazareth in Galilee, had to participate in the census in the same way *everyone else did*. Because he was a descendant of *King David*, his ancestral city was Bethlehem, David's birthplace. Mary, who was now late in her pregnancy *that the messenger Gabriel had*

predicted, ⁶ accompanied Joseph. While in Bethlehem, she went into labor ⁷ and gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped the baby in a blanket and laid Him in a feeding trough because the inn had no room for them.

⁸ Nearby, in the fields outside of Bethlehem, a group of shepherds were guarding their flocks *from predators* in the darkness of night. ⁹ Suddenly a messenger of the Lord stood in front of them, and the darkness was replaced by a glorious light—the shining light of God’s glory. They were terrified!

Messenger: ¹⁰ Don’t be afraid! Listen! I bring good news, news of great joy, news that will affect all people everywhere. ¹¹ Today, in the city of David, a Liberator has been born for you! He is the promised Anointed One, the Supreme Authority! ¹² You will know you have found Him when you see a baby, wrapped in a blanket, lying in a feeding trough.

¹³ At that moment, the first heavenly messenger was joined by thousands of other messengers—a vast heavenly choir. They praised God.

¹⁴ **Heavenly Choir:** To the highest heights of the universe, glory to God!
And on earth, peace among all people who bring pleasure to God!

Unison Prayer

All: Gentle God of love, we thank you for your constant love and for the blessings of this day. We know that even when we cannot see or feel you, still you are there. Help us to remember you and to listen for your voice in the words of family, friends, and strangers. Kindle our hearts and awaken hope, that we may know you as you reveal yourself in the world and in our lives. Let the light of your holy Spirit shine like these candles in the darkness, lighting the way for all who feel despairing, lost, or forgotten, and grant that it may come to dwell so deeply in our hearts that when we leave this place it may shine on, for us and for those we meet along the way. Amen.

Hymn

(The First Noel, UMH #245 verses 1, 2 and 4)

1 The first Noel the angel did say
was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
in fields where they lay keeping their sheep,
on a cold winter's night that was so deep.

Refrain:

Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,
born is the King of Israel.

2 They looked up and saw a star
shining in the east, beyond them far;
and to the earth it gave great light,
and so it continued both day and night. (Refrain)

4 This star drew nigh to the northwest,
o'er Bethlehem it took its rest;
and there it did both stop and stay,
right over the place where Jesus lay. [Refrain]

Blessing and Dismissal

Leader: The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace, both now and forever more. Amen.

Please come up and take an ornament with you to represent God's comfort and love this season and always. If you want to stay and pray you are welcome to stay. Pastor Angie is here to support you also in prayer.

This worship is inspired by a Blue Christmas Service ordered by The Cathedral Church of Saint Andrew, Honolulu, HI.

Special Thanks to our accompanist, Nancy Drier and our flutist, Lyna Williams-Whitehead.