

Blue Christmas Service

December 17, 2023

4:00 p.m.



Milford United Methodist Church

206 E. Ann Street
Milford, PA 18337
(570) 296-6124

Rev. Jennifer Lovallo, Pastor
Jeffrey Fornoff, Music Director

GATHERING MUSIC

CALL TO WORSHIP

Light and peace, in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Thanks be to God.

If I said, "The darkness will definitely hide me; the light will become night around me," even then the darkness isn't too dark for God! Nighttime would shine bright as day, because darkness is the same as light to You. (*Psalm 139:11-12*) Let us pray.

EVENING PRAYER

We call upon you, O Lord; come quickly. Give ear to our voices when we call to you. Let our prayers be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of our hands as an evening sacrifice. Through Christ, you created the whole world; through Christ, you preserve it. In the brightness of your Son we spend each day; in the darkness of the night you light our way; always you protect us with the umbrella of your love. To you, God, be all praise and glory forever and forever. Amen.

ADVENT WREATH CANDLE LIGHTING LITANY OF REMEMBRANCE

We light this first Advent 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 this season which anticipates Christmas.

May God's eternal love surround them.

CHRISTMAS HYMN

"Star-Child"

TFWS #2095++

Sing *Star-Child, earth-Child, Go-between of God
Love Child, Christ Child, Heaven's lightning rod,
This year, this year, let the day arrive
When Christmas comes for everyone, everyone alive!*

We light the second candle to redeem the pain of loss: the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, the loss of health. 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.

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

Sing *Street child, beat child, No place left to go,
Hurt child, used child, No one wants to know,
This year, this year, let the day arrive
When Christmas comes for everyone, everyone alive!*

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

Let us remember that dawn defeats darkness.

Sing *Grown child, old child, Memory full of years,
Sad child, lost child, Story told in tears,
This year, this year, let the day arrive
When Christmas comes for everyone, everyone alive!*

This 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.

Let us remember the one who shows the way and who goes with us into our tomorrows.

Sing *Hope-for-peace Child, God's stupendous sign,
Down-to-earth child, Star of stars that shine,
This year, this year, let the day arrive
When Christmas comes for everyone, everyone alive!*

INTERCESSIONS

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

God, we come to you as Christmas dawns 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 our longest nights, we offer to you the pain in our hearts, the traumas that some of us cannot put into words. Loving God, hear our prayer,

And in your merciful love, answer.

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, lost. Lord help us find our way. Loving God, hear our prayer,

And in your merciful love, answer.

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,

And in your merciful love, answer.

I invite you to offer your own intercessions and thanksgivings either silently or aloud.

PRAYERS OF LIGHT

(Persons are encouraged to come forward to light a candle for each special prayer request they bring.)

SHARING OF THE LORD'S PRAYER

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, forever. Amen.

READING FROM THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES *Psalm 40:1-8*

OT p.513

READING FROM THE GOSPEL

John 14:1-7

NT p.108

REFLECTION

SUNG RESPONSE "Christmas Bells" *by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (see insert)*

PRAYER FOR THE NIGHT

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 dear to us, and all who have no peace. The night heralds the dawn. Let us look expectantly to a new day, new joys, and new possibilities, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

THE BLESSING

May Christ, who by his Incarnation gathered all to God, fill you with joy and peace; and the blessings of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain

with you always. Go forth in the name of the promised Christ.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

SENDING MUSIC