

Music - O Come, O Come Emmanuel/ Let all mortal flesh keep silence

Welcome

Tonight we welcome you to our Blue Christmas service, a service that has been put together especially for those of us who are not feeling particularly merry and bright right now.

I hope that you'll find this a safe place to be transparent with yourself and with God, a safe place to admit that maybe you're not ok at the moment, that maybe what you're really feeling is sad, discouraged, or even angry. A place for you to be real with your struggles and your questions.

This has been a hard year, a year of disconnection, of social distance, a year of incredible changes and uncertainties. It may feel that there is a hollowness in your heart that the preparations for Christmas the shops tell us is so vital seems not to be touching.

I hope that as you look around you tonight, and as you think about the Christmas message, you'll find comfort and hope in knowing that you are not alone and that your questions, doubts and struggles are shared and OK.

Tonight there'll be a variety of music to listen to. We'll light some candles and spend time in prayer and silent reflection. After the service, if it would help to have someone to talk to or pray with, please stay on.

Let us commit this time together to God

Prayer

God of mercy and love, we gather here today bringing our pain, our sorrow and our confusion to this holy space tonight. Please meet us in our darkness, and give us freedom to struggle together as we seek your presence. We ask for strength for today, courage for tomorrow and peace for the past. Amen.

Light the central candle

Reading

The word

Sometimes

words are not enough
for everything we have to say.

Words can't beat like a heart.
A verb won't sweat or bleed.
A noun doesn't get thirsty.
An adjective cannot feel pain.
Something gets lost
in translation into words.

So when God
needed to express
a love deeper than words
he used body language
of a kind not known on earth before. *Godfrey Rust*

Reading

John 1: 11 - 14

He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth

Place an empty chair

This empty chair represents those who won't be home for Christmas.

Perhaps a relationship has ended.

Perhaps sickness has changed how things used to be.

Perhaps someone has died...

Light the first outer candle

We light this first candle to remember those we have loved and lost.

We pause to remember their names, their faces, their voices and the memories of them that we hold in our hearts.

[Pause]

We thank God for them and ask for his comfort, and when we are feeling overcome with sadness, we ask for the peace that is greater than we can ever understand.

Light the second candle

The empty chair also represents the pain and sadness that can come from other events that enter our lives, uninvited and unwanted – leaving us reeling in pain and shock, unable to shake the feeling that it wasn't supposed to be like that

So we light this candle to represent other losses that we find ourselves faced with.

The loss that coronavirus has brought into our world;

The loss of work,

of independence,

of freedom,

the loss of confidence or security,

plans that did not work out,

or hopes that ended in despair.

We pause now for you to tell the God who longs to bind up those who are broken-hearted, about some of the losses that you are feeling at this time.

[Pause]

Light the third candle

This candle represents our courage: the courage to face our sadness, to share our feelings with others, our doubts and fears, our anger, frustration or depression, and to dare to hope in the depths of our pain.

We pause now for you to tell the God who longs to take you by the hand and says to you, do not fear, I will help you, about some areas where you need help in finding courage.

[Pause]

Light the fourth candle

We light this fourth candle to remember those who have supported us in our pain.

We pause to remember the prayers, the words of comfort and support, the acts of kindness from family and friends and those who stood with us in our time of need.

[Pause]

We thank you God for sending others to remind us that we are never alone.
And we thank you for sending your son, Jesus. **Amen.**

Music

We're going to listen to Avo Part's Magnificat the Song of Mary. Its about 6 minutes long.
Whilst the music is playing can I invite you just to sit and rest in God's presence.

Focus on the central candle

Standing here in the centre of the candles that represent some of life's joy and pain, this central candle represents Jesus who has come to be Immanuel, God with us, in the midst of it all.

Reading

Epilogue

Our story told, the mystery remains—
God's hiding everywhere. This is the way
the love that made the universe sustains
the broken Eden of our every day.

There's nothing to pay back, nothing to earn,
nothing we need to do; yet it may be
a lifelong enterprise for us to learn
the secret power of humility. *Godfrey Rust*

Reading

Philippians 2: 5-11

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.
Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name

that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Prayer

O God, be with us in our darkness.
Make your face shine upon us and give us peace.
We pray for your Holy Spirit to be at work within us,
all of us who are gathered here tonight,
may your Holy Spirit comfort us, may it sustain us,
may it remind us of your constant love for us.
We trust this time of listening to you
and ask you to open our hearts and our minds
to whatever it is that we need to hear from you tonight.
Amen.

Music and the lighting of individual candles Praise you in this storm by Casting Crowns or I'm alive in You Jesus Culture

Whilst the music is playing you're invited, if you'd like to do so, to come up and take a candle to represent whatever pain and loss you're experiencing most strongly tonight, and to light it from the candle in the centre that represents Jesus, as a way of saying thank you to him for being the light in our darkness and then to plant the candle down in the sand in this tray as you ask for God's help to keep on trusting him in the middle of whatever's going on around you.

Closing

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff - they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

Blessing

Comforting God, as we leave this place
please continue to wrap us in your presence.
Be with us in our struggles, and when we get lost in the darkness,
shine your light and help us find our way back to you.
Amen.

Music = Taize Wait for the Lord https://music.amazon.co.uk/albums/B00IVEVJJI?trackAsin=B00IVEVZH4&do=play&ref=dm_ws_dp_sp_bb_phfs_xx_xx

As you leave you'll notice a basket of blue ornaments. If you'd like to take one to hang on your tree to remind you that God is with you in the midst of whatever you're going through, then please do so.