

Blue December



Advent 2020

An evening service for all people, because we are all experiencing untold grief this Advent.

One set of readings for each week of Advent, moving from troubles to hopes.

If praying independently, we encourage you to read all of it aloud.

If with others, divide up the leadership of the plain text, and share in the words in bold. Perhaps connect over the phone or video chat to share this prayer with your connections.

You may want to light candles or find another outward way to express your prayers that are brought forth by these texts.

You may also want to choose a selection of sacred seasonal recorded music to listen to where it says music.

MUSIC

Because the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them. He will lead them to the springs of life-giving water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. *Revelation 7.17*

God of abundant mercy, you have given us grace to pray with one heart and one voice, even though our hearts are weary and our voices may tremble. Comfort, comfort, O Lord, speak to us of the peace that awaits us, bring forth the balm of healing for our wounded souls.

We ask all this, trusting in the promise you have made to hear the prayers of your beloved children in the Name of your Holy Child, Jesus. ***Amen.***

There are four separate sets of readings for each week.

FIRST WEEK

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
 Meanwhile the world goes on.
 Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
 are moving across the landscapes,
 over the prairies and the deep trees,
 the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
 are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
 the world offers itself to your imagination,
 calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting –
 **over and over announcing your place
 in the family of things.**

Wild Geese by Mary Oliver

Some of us walk into Christmas
Tethered to our unresolved yesterdays
The pain still stabbing; the hurt still throbbing.
It's not that we don't know better;
It's just that we can't stand up anymore by ourselves.
On the way to Bethlehem, will you give us a hand?

Into this Silent Night by Ann Weems

God of our life, there are days when the burdens we carry chafe our shoulders and weigh us down;
when the road seems dreary and endless, the skies gray and threatening.
Flood the path with light, run our eyes to where the skies are full of promise; tune our hearts to
brave music; give us the sense of comradeship with heroes and saints of every age; and so quicken
our spirits that we may be able to encourage the souls of
all who journey with us on the road of life, to your honor and glory. Amen.

Augustine of Hippo

SECOND WEEK

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, *
 then were we like those who dream.
Then was our mouth filled with laughter, *
 and our tongue with shouts of joy.
Then they said among the nations, *
 "The LORD has done great things for them."

The LORD has done great things for us, *
and we are glad indeed.
Restore our fortunes, O LORD, *
like the watercourses of the Negev.
Those who sowed with tears *
will reap with songs of joy.
Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, *
will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves.

Psalm 126

One of the queerest spots on Earth — I hope — is the patch of planet where, according to tradition, a cave once stabled animals, and where Mary gave birth to a son whose later preaching — scholars of every stripe agree, with varying enthusiasm — caused the occupying Romans to crucify him. Generations of Christians have churched over the traditional Bethlehem spot to the highest degree. Centuries of additions have made the architecture peculiar, but no one can see the church anyway, because **many monasteries clamp onto it in clusters like barnacles**. The Greek Orthodox Church owns the grotto site now, in the form of the Church of the Nativity.

There, in the Church of the Nativity, I took worn stone stairways to descend to levels of dark rooms, chapels, and dungeonlike corridors where hushed people passed. The floors were black stone of cracked marble. Dense brocades hung down old stone walls. Oil lamps hung in layers. Each polished silver or brass lamp seemed to absorb more light than its orange flame emitted, so the more lamps shone, the darker the space.

Packed into a tiny, domed upper chamber, Norwegians sang, as every other group did in turn, a Christmas carol. The stone dome bounced the sound around. **The people sounded like seraphs singing inside a bell, sore amazed.**

Descending once more, I passed several monks, narrow men, fine-faced and black, who wore tall black hats and long black robes. Ethiopians, they use the oldest Christian rite. At a lower level, in a small room, I peered over half a stone wall and saw Europeans below; they whispered in a language I could not identify.

Distant music sounded deep, as if from within my ribs. The music was, in fact, people from all over the world in the upper chamber, singing harmonies in their various tongues. The music threaded the vaults.

Now I climbed down innumerable dark stone stairs to the main part, the deepest basement: The Grotto of the Nativity. The grotto was down yet another smoky stairway, at the back of a stone cave far beneath street level. **This was the place. It smelled of wet sand. It was a narrow cave about ten feet wide; cracked marble paved it.** Bunched tapers, bending grotesque in the heat, lighted a corner of floor. People had to kneel, one by one, under arches of brocade hangings, and stretch into a crouch down among dozens of gaudy hanging lamps, to see it.

...Any patch of ground anywhere smacks more of God's presence on Earth, to me, than did this marble grotto. The ugliness of the blunt and bumpy silver star impressed me. The

bathetic pomp of the heavy, tasseled brocades, the marble, the censers hanging from chains, the embroidered antependium, the aspergillum, the crosiers, the ornate lamps — some human's idea of elegance — bespoke grand comedy, too, that God put up with it. And why should he not? Things here on Earth get a whole lot worse than bad taste.

“Every day,” said Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, “**the glory is ready to emerge from its debasement.**”

Bethlehem by Annie Dillard

Come O Christ, come to our divided world;
come to our fragmented lives; come to heal and save. In you our life is one again, and all things come together: each connected to the other,
each reflected in the other,
ourselves and all things living: heaven and earth, time and space,
the whole created universe, in you.

Christ of the cosmos, living Word, come to heal and save. Amen.

Candles & Conifers by Ruth Burgess

THIRD WEEK

Our hope to circumvent heartbreak in adulthood is beautifully and ironically child-like; heartbreak is as inescapable and inevitable as breathing, a part and a parcel of every path, asking for its due in every sincere course an individual takes, it may be that there may be not only no real life without the raw revelation of heartbreak, but no single path we can take within a life that will allow us to escape without having that imaginative organ
we call the heart broken by what it holds and then has to let go.

If heartbreak is inevitable and inescapable, it might be asking us to look for it and make friends with it, to see it as our constant and instructive companion, and perhaps, in the depth of its impact as well as in its hindsight,
and even, its own reward.

Heartbreak asks us not to look for an alternative path, because there is no alternative path. It is an introduction to what we love and have loved, an inescapable and often beautiful question, something and someone that has been with us all along,
asking us to be ready for the ultimate letting go.

David Whyte

When the world was dark and the city was quiet, you came.
You crept in beside us. And no one knew.

Only the few who dared to believe that God might do something different.

Will you do the same this Christmas, Lord?

Will you come into the darkness of tonight's world; not the friendly darkness as when sleep rescues us from tiredness, but the fearful darkness, in which people have stopped believing that war will end or that food will come or that a government will change or that the Church cares?

Will you come into that darkness and do something different to save your people from death and despair? Will you come into the quietness of this town, not the friendly quietness as when lovers hold hands, but the fearful silence when the phone has not rung, the letter has not come, the friendly voice no longer speaks, the doctor's face says it all? Will you come into that darkness, and do something different, not to distract, but to embrace your people?

And will you come into the dark corners and the quiet places of our lives?

We ask this not because we are guilt-ridden or want to be, but because the fullness our lives long for depends upon us being as open and vulnerable to you as you were to us, when you came, wearing no more than diapers, and trusting human hands to hold their maker. Will you come into our lives, if we open them to you and do something different?

When the world was dark and the city was quiet you came. You crept in beside us.

Do the same this Christmas, Lord. Do the same this Christmas.

When the World Was Dark by John Bell

Holy God, you are present in the confusion and dislocation of the world.
We encounter you not by turning our back on that world but by plunging into it
with the faith that encounter with you occurs
in the midst of the encounter of human with human,
especially in the struggle to create signs of your coming reign of peace and justice.
All this we pray in the Holy Name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Harvey Cox

FOURTH WEEK

“Therefore, I say to you, don't worry about your life, what you'll eat or what you'll drink, or about your body, what you'll wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds in the sky. They don't sow seed or harvest grain or gather crops into barns. Yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth much more than they are?”

Matthew 6.25-26

God did not wait 'til the world was ready, 'til...nations were at peace.

God came when the Heavens were unsteady
and prisoners cried out for release.

God did not wait for the perfect time.

God came when the need was deep and great.

God dined with sinners in all their grime, turned water into wine.

God did not wait 'til hearts were pure.

In joy God came to a tarnished world of sin and doubt.

To a world like ours, of anguished shame,

God came and God's Light would not go out.

God came to a world which did not mesh;

to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.

In the mystery of the Word made Flesh,

the maker of the stars was born.

We cannot wait 'til the world is sane to raise our songs with joyful voice,

or to share our grief, to touch our pain,

God came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!

First Coming by Madeleine L'Engle

MUSIC

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort in love, any sharing in the Spirit, any sympathy, complete my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love,
being united, and agreeing with each other.

Don't do anything for selfish purposes,

but with humility think of others as better than yourselves.

Instead of each person watching out for their own good, watch out for what is better for others. **Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus:**

Though he was in the form of God,

he did not consider being equal with God something to exploit.

But he emptied himself

by taking the form of a slave

and by becoming like human beings.

When he found himself in the form of a human,

he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death,
even death on a cross.

Therefore, God highly honored him

and gave him a name above all names,
so that at the name of Jesus everyone
in heaven, on earth, and under the earth might bow
and every tongue confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2. 1-11

PRAYERS IN THE NIGHT

Each of us has come here this evening, bearing our own hurts or the pain of others.
We may be immersed in our suffering; we may be devastated by the cruelty of this time.
We may feel that we are all alone, isolated from friends, forgotten by families.
We may even feel that we are beyond the reach of God's grace.

Yet we are here where God came to us as a vulnerable child, a God who lived among us,
who died for us, and who, in dying, experienced for himself the feeling of abandonment.
We come here because tragedy is not the end of the story.

We trust that Christ rose from the grave and God will not leave us in our deepest need.

For waiting and not knowing what is to come, for the space of being ready and quiet and attentive;
we praise you O God,
for the night and the day are both alike to you.

For staying silent and for the fear of feeling that nothing can be done to change things; we praise
you O God, **for the night and the day are both alike to you.**

For choosing to act, not knowing what the future will bring; we praise you O God:
for the night and the day are both alike to you.

For hoping in a world which longs for your reign, for the wrestling and the laboring of creation
toward justice and freedom; we praise you O God,
for the night and the day are both alike to you.

For the needs of our hearts; for those who are ill or troubled; for those who have died
and those who grieve; we praise you O God,
for the night and the day are both alike to you.

Spirit of God, be with us who are weighed down by any, many and unknown causes.
Relieve our suffering, that we may feel the hope and peace of your presence.

Comfort all people in despair with the grace of your promise,
O God; that we may wait with hope for the fulfilling of your Word,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SILENCE. MAYBE MORE THAN YOU ARE COMFORTABLE WITH.

On the day when the weight deadens on your shoulders and you stumble,
may the tender light bring you balance.

And when your eyes freeze behind the grey window and the ghost of loss gets in to you,
may a flock of colors – indigo, red, green, and azure blue
-come to awaken in you a meadow of delight.

When the canvas frays in the storm of thought and a stain of ocean blackens beneath you,
**may there come across the waters
a path of yellow moonlight to bring you safely home.**

May the nourishment of the earth be yours,
may the clarity of light be yours,
may the fluency of the ocean be yours,
may the protection of the saints be yours.

**And so may a slow wind work these words of love around you,
an invisible cloak to mind your life.**

John O'Donohue

May the God of infinite grace scatter the weight of despair
and strengthen our hearts with holiness; and may God's blessing be with us,
Christ's peace be with us, and the Spirit's outpouring be with us, now and always.. **Amen.**

MUSIC

As we live, we join with others in identifying common ground and build ties of shared meaning and value. All lives have heartache and grief, and the night of this season makes these realities unavoidable. We invite you to carry the beauty, warmth and light in your heart, into the night, and into the days ahead.

*Created over many years by the Reverend Jane Gober, Rector, Christ Church, Ridley Park , Pennsylvania, USA
Sources Include: Simple massing priest (Anglican church of Canada) blog, authorized Episcopal resources and Blue
Christmas Holy Eucharist, St. Paul's Fayetteville, Common Worship, COE*