

### A CANDLE FOR FAITH AND HOPE

Leader: We light this fourth candle to remember our faith and the gift of hope that the Christmas story offers to us. 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 us the way, who brings the truth and who bears the light.

### THE CHRIST CANDLE

Leader: We light the Christ candle, remembering the One who came, in the fullness of time, to bear our griefs and carry our sorrows. We remember Jesus, our Christ, who was and is and is to come.

### AFFIRMATION OF FAITH (unison)

from Romans 8

We believe there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, and we know that in everything God works for good with those who love God, who are **called according to God's purpose. We are sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.**

### PASSING THE CHRISTMAS BLESSING OF PEACE

Leader: The peace of Christ be with you.

People: And also with you.

### SCRIPTURE

Revelation 21:1-5

"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, **for the old order of things has passed away.**"

### BENEDICTION

May we be gentle with ourselves, remembering that we are created in the image of God. May we go into the world with honesty and thanksgiving, embracing tears, laughter, and all that is good. May the protection of God comfort us, the courage of Jesus sustain us, and the tenderness of the Spirit embrace us. **Amen.** (Depart in Silence)

*Please respect the quiet of this holy space and leave in silence.*

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Scripture Readings are from the New International Version unless otherwise indicated.

Many thanks to Rev. Ann Houlette, Chair of the Indiana Kentucky Conference WISE Committee for her inspiration and guidance in the creation of this evening's Blue Christmas Service of Healing & Remembrance.

## The United Church of Christ (Congregational)

# Blue Christmas

Service of Healing  
and Remembrance



Sunday, December 10, 2023  
7:00 p.m.



THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
(Congregational)  
13740 Pearl Road Strongsville, Ohio 44136  
(440) 238-6697

Rev. Heidi Denman McDougall, *Pastor*  
Thomas M. Foley, *Director of Music*  
Mike Elkins, *Associate Director of Music*  
Karen Bates, *Guitar*  
Doug Thorn, *Sound*

Sunday – December 10, 2023 – 7:00 P.M.



#### PRE-SERVICE MUSIC

“Mary, Did You Know?”, “O Holy Night”

#### WORDS OF WELCOME

#### PROMISES FROM SCRIPTURE

Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the mountains– where does my help come from?  
My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

#### CALL TO WORSHIP

L: Creator God, lover of the universe, we come to You in this quiet place seeking Your reassurance and Your hope.

P: We come in the midst of noise, listening for Your gentle heartbeat.

L: For those who are chilled by grief and pain,

P: bring the warmth of Your love.

L: For those who are overwhelmed by feelings that exhaust and stifle,

P: bring the cooling breeze of Your love.

L: For those who are caught in the glare of expectations,

P: bring the comforting darkness of Your love.

L: For those who find themselves in shadows of anxiety,

P: bring the morning dawn of your love.

L: Breathe courage into our day,

P: whisper strength into our dreams.

L: We ask these things in the name of Your child, Jesus, who was born into a chaotic world of birth, death and rebirth -- just like today.

ALL: Amen.

#### HYMN 245

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (1, 2)

#### OPENING PRAYER (unison)

God of love and understanding, we gather here this evening to confront our pain in the midst of the world's celebration. Help us to know that You are present with us in all of our moods and feelings and seasons. Grant us a taste of the hope, peace, joy and love that You promise to all of Your people through the gift of Your son, Jesus. Amen.

#### GOOD NEWS FOR OUR TIME AND PLACE

Isaiah 40:1-11

A voice of one calling: “In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord;  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

#### HYMN 244

“Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus”

#### SCRIPTURE

Luke 2:1-7

*While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.*

#### HYMN 250

“O Little Town of Bethlehem” (1,4)

#### A TIME OF PRAYER

Matthew 11:28-29

The Message

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.”

#### A TIME OF PASTORAL PRAYER

#### A TIME FOR NAMING

#### A TIME OF QUIET MEDITATION

#### 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 debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

#### CANDLE LIGHTING

John 1: 1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

#### A CANDLE FOR REMEMBRANCE

Leader: We light this first candle to remember those whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember their names, their faces, their voices, the memories that bind them to us in this season.

People: **May God's eternal light surround them.**

#### A CANDLE FOR LOSS

Leader: We light this second candle to redeem the pain of loss: the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, the loss of health. We pause to gather up the pain of the past and offer it to God, asking that from God's hands we receive the gift of peace.

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

#### A CANDLE FOR OURSELVES AND OUR SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Leader: We light this third candle to remember ourselves this Christmastime. We pause and remember these past weeks and months: the disbelief, the anger, the down times, the joy and sorrow of memories, the hugs and handshakes of family and friends who care for us. We give thanks for all the support we have known.

People: Let us remember that after every night comes the dawn of a new day.