

When Christmas Hurts”



St. Paul’s “Blue Christmas” Devotional

*For those experiencing Pandemic Fatigue,
Stress, Illness, Exhaustion,
Worry, Grief, Sadness (most of us)*

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“When Christmas Hurts”

Find a quiet place for a time of reflection.

In the name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen

Opening Sentences

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light on those who lived in a land of deep shadow, a light has shone. For the yoke that was weighing upon them and the burden upon their shoulders, Thou hast broken in pieces, O God, our Redeemer.

Prayer

Loving and gracious God, in the quiet of the evening, we come to You, trusting You hear our prayer. We gather in this place, seeking Your peace and comfort. We come with feelings of deep hurt, sadness, anger, relief and hope. We know Your love is deep enough and profound enough to handle our feelings, our fears and our longings that are sometimes beyond expression. Just as candles break through the darkness of a room, Your light, dear Jesus, breaks through the darkness of our souls. Open our eyes and our hearts to Your healing love. Give us courage for the facing of these hours. We pray in the Name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

Hymn (sing or read) “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

A Reading from the book of *Isaiah* – *Isaiah 61:1-4*

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; ³ to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a

beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified. ⁴ They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

A Reading from the book of *Psalms* - *Psalms* 121

I will lift up my eyes to the hills, from where is my help to come? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth He will not let your foot be moved and he who watches over you will not fall asleep. Behold, he who keeps watch over Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord himself watches over you; the Lord is your shade at your right hand. So that the sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; it is he who shall keep you safe. The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in, from this time forth for ever more.

A Reading from the Gospel of *Matthew* – *Matthew* 11:28-30

²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Hymn:

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

O come, thou Rod of Jesse, free
thine own from Satan’s tyranny;
from depths of hell thy people save,
and give them victory over the grave.

Rejoice! Rejoice!

Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

Message from Pastor Lemke

Friends, As I was thinking about what to share with you in the Blue Christmas Devotional, I came across this poem and thought it was very fitting. It reminds us that no matter what our feelings are, ones of sadness or joy, we, as the people of God have every reason to filled with hope and peace and joy because Jesus came FOR ME! May you have a blessed Christmas in the Christ Child’s Name!

FOR ME

Two thousand years ago He came,
And many since have spread the fame
Of Jesus, Babe Who calmly slept
In manger crude by Mary kept.
We hear of shepherds gathered 'round,
And angels making joyful sound.

We learn that wise men came to see,
And brought their gifts on bended knee.

Yes, all this happened long ago,
And it's a fact that many know.

Yet, it's something God has done for me.

So, in viewing Christ's Nativity

I think some subjectivity

Is in order, if you please.

I, too, must fall upon my knees.

Yes, just as pond'ring Mary gazed,

I, too, in awe, must stand amazed.

As Jehovah's Son was with her there,

He's here with me through joy and care.

So I will praise as shepherds did

For Jesus came to earth to bid

My heavy heart to present peace,

And Jesus did my soul release.

As angels rang their praise about,

So I must let my joy ring out;

For they say hope for all mankind,

And I can see, who once was blind.

As with gifts the wise men loved to praise

I, too, shall lift my earthly days.

For as they that Eastern star did see,

So God has shined His light for me.

For me! He came and calmly slept.

For me! The Father's laws He kept.

For me! He in the stable stayed.

For me! He in the garden prayed.

For me! The infant flesh He met.

For me! Those drops of blood He sweat.

For me! He did from Herod flee.

For me! He sat at Pilate's knee.

For me! He grew up as a youth.

For me! He said, "I am the truth."

For me! He was so oft abused.

A TIME FOR REMEMBRANCE

The First Advent Candle reminds us of the people who we have loved and lost. We remember their name, their voice, their face, the memory that binds them to us in this season. We give thanks for their lives.

Prayer: Lord, you take our loved ones by the hand and lead them home! Accept our love and thanksgiving as we entrust them to your loving care, in the Paradise of freedom. We thank you for the place You have prepared for us. We ask that you would fill us with motivation and energy in the days ahead when we feel like giving up; remind us often of our true homeland when we are caught up in the desolation of life's journey. Help us to find joy, not only in the people, events and the beauty of nature which surrounds us, but in your forever presence. We celebrate the treasures of love with them again, when we are all in your presence forever. May this truth sustain us in the days to come. Take sad and aching hearts and comfort us. Comfort us, for we only feel hollowness and emptiness. God of sorrowing, draw near! Amen.

Hymn

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer
our spirits by thine advent here;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

The Second Advent Candle redeems the pain of loss; the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs with the security they bring, the loss of health in ourselves or in family members, the loss of joy and peace in our lives from the stresses which surround us, the loss and loneliness we experience when our loved ones do not share our faith. 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.

Prayer: God of mystery, we turn our hearts to you. We come before you in need of peace, grateful for the mystery of life and ever keenly

aware of your promises of guidance and protection. We want to place our trust in you, but our hearts grow fearful and anxious. We forget so easily that you will be with us in all that we experience. Teach us to be patient with the transformation of our lives and to be open to the changes which we are now going through. Amen.

Hymn: ***“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”***

O come, thou Key of David, come,
and open wide our heavenly home;
make safe the way that leads on high,
and close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

Third Advent Candle is for us who experience a loss of direction in our lives. God of the Exodus, you led Moses and your people through the wilderness to a new land. Hear our prayer. We want so much to have a sense of direction, to know where we are and where we ought to be headed. But the darkness and the questions stay. You ask us to be full of faith, to believe deep within that You are our signpost, that you are our wisdom and our guide and to trust in your presence. Your words to us are clear: “Do not fear, I go before you.”

Prayer: God of our depths, we cry out to you to be our guide. Help us to have a strong sense of inner direction and grant that we may have the reassurance of knowing that we are on the right path. Take our lives and use them according to your will. Take all that is lost in us and bring it home with you. Amen.

Hymn: ***“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”***

O come, O come, great Lord of might,
who to thy tribes on Sinai’s height
in ancient times once gave the law
in cloud and majesty and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

The fourth Advent candle is a sign of hope, the 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.

Prayer: O God whose spirit is known by those whose hearts are thankful, and who makes cheerfulness a companion of strength, lift up our hearts, we pray, to a joyous confidence in your care. Guide us when we cannot see the way. Teach us to know that a shadow is only a shadow, because the light of eternal goodness shines behind the object of our fears. Where there is love in life, teach us to find it; help us to trust it and enable us to grow in the power of Your great love. So our lives may bring comfort and encouragement to others, we ask it, in the name of Jesus Christ whose life is our light. Amen.

Hymn: “*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel!*”

O come, thou Root of Jesse's tree,
 an ensign of thy people be;
 before thee rulers silent fall;
 all peoples on thy mercy call.
 Rejoice! Rejoice!

Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

In the spirit of this season, we now ask our God for what we need as we participate in the Christmas season, as people coping with loss, pain, suffering, loneliness, grief, and sadness.

God, we come to you as Christmas dawns with the 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, and the traumas that cannot be put into words.

Compassionate God, A death or loss has changed our experience of Christmas. Once it was a special time for us. Now we drift, alone, lost.

The Christmas season reminds us of all that used to be and cannot be anymore. The memories of what were, the fears of what may be, still stifle us. All around us we hear the sounds of celebration. But we experience a sense of feeling blue. Be near to us always, but especially during this holiday season.

God of great compassion and love, listen to our prayers. Grant to us this Christmas, the blessing we ask in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray

We pray as He taught us: 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 and ever. Amen

Lighting of Candles

You are invited to offer your personal wounds to God who loves each of us deeply and wants to carry your pain. God waits patiently, gently calling out: "Give me your pain, come to me... all who labor and are heavy laden, I will refresh you!"

(light a candle if you wish)

As candles burn and finally go out, we remember that suffering passes, though memories remain forever.

CLOSING

Embrace and claim the darkness that is present both in the world and in our own lives. As people illumined by the light of the Christ Child this Christmas season. May the Christ Child, born in a lowly stable, himself an outcast and marginale, bring light, comfort, peace, and joy this holiday season. *(A definition: "marginale" – not of central importance)*

Hymn:

"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel!"

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice!

Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel

May the hope of the Christ Child sustain us through this darkness
That together He may shine through us. Amen.

**Note: The hymn “O come, O come, Emmanuel” is a song of people in darkness longing for God’s light. It is not calling us to rejoice in the worldly form of the word, but calling our spirits and souls to reflect the true hope and joy that only God can give.*



St. Paul’s Stephen Ministers are here to serve you:

We are a caring ministry – we listen, we pray, we are confidential and ask for nothing in return for our service.

Please contact a Pastor or one of the Stephen Ministers below if you would like to experience this caring relationship – for an hour, a day, for a month, or as long as you wish.

Rev. Larry Lemke, Vacancy Pastor
Rev. Jerry Doellinger, Assistant Pastor
Tim Bickel, Visitation

Stephen Leaders/Ministers:

Sue Cross
Pam Krog
Marcie Morey
Judy Westergren

Stephen Ministers

Steve Larson
Joe Popp
Bill Tollefson
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