

St Andrew's and St George's West Church

Monday 21 December, 4.00pm

Blue Christmas

**A gentle, reflective time for those who carry pain or loss
this festive season**



Piano Music

Selection of pieces by Schubert, Handel, Mozart, C S Lang

'Lord, let your Spirit meet us here to mend body, mind and soul, to disentangle peace from pain and make your broken people whole.'

(From Hymn 718, by John L Bell & Graham Maule)

Welcome

Opening Prayer

Our God,
we gather together in the bleak midwinter.
The days are short.
The nights are long.
They mirror the reality of our hearts,
revealing your gracious spirit that
mourns with us in grief,
cries with us in sorrow,
sits with us in despair.

Christmas shows us that
you are not a distant God,

removed from human pain,
but a faithful companion
closer to us than our own tears.
Help us to feel your presence and strength
at this time when we are brave enough to remember and to reflect.

Many are missing the togetherness Christmas usually brings.
Yet, you are with us
and you will never leave us.
So, we come as we are,
carrying within us places that are heart-sore
and together we pray.
For we know the angels are still singing,
even if we strain to hear them. Amen

Scripture Reading

Psalm 121 (NIV)

I lift my eyes to the hills – where does my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot slip – he who watches over you will not slumber.
He who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord watches over you – He is your shade at your right hand.
So, the sun shall not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.
The Lord will keep you from all harm – he will watch over your life.
The Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and for
evermore.

Lighting of a Candle to symbolise God's presence

Taizé Music

Poem

God's Embrace

by Joyce Rupp

Scripture Reading Matthew 11:28-30

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Lighting of the Candles

Light Candle 1

Lighting this candle, we reflect on 2020, the year of COVID-19 and all it brought to our lives and our world: lockdown, enforced separation from loved ones, prevented from being with those dying and attending funerals. We are mindful of the cumulative impact of months of restrictions in people's mental, physical and emotional health.

As we remember those who have suffered in a myriad of other ways, we offer our thanks to God for all the selfless giving from frontline workers, the community initiatives, the scientific and government efforts to help stem the tide of infection and keep lives as safe and tolerable as possible. The commencement of vaccinations brings us hope.

God of all comfort, strengthen and be with us and all who are hurting due to COVID-19. Take a moment to remember those affected

You are invited to say names aloud or in the silence of our heart...

Taizé 'O Lord hear my prayer'

Light Candle 2

Lighting this candle, we remember those we have loved & lost in the last year. We pause to remember them by name, see their faces, look into their eyes, hear their voices, and hold their memories in our hearts once more. We thank God for the gift of each one in our lives, and seek comfort for our sad, aching hearts, and healing for our emptiness and sorrow.

God of all comfort, strengthen and be with us and all who are hurting and grieving. Take a moment to remember those who have died

You are invited to say names aloud or in the silence of your heart...

Taizé 'O Lord hear my prayer'

Light Candle 3

Lighting this candle, we remember with compassion those struggling with other unexpected, uninvited and unwanted life events: physical/mental illness, chains of addiction, broken relationships, loneliness, loss of independence or freedom, loss of employment, income or security, loss of direction, homelessness, and victims of violence.

God of all comfort, strengthen and be with us and all who are hurting due to life events. Take a moment to remember those who are struggling for any reason

You are invited to say names aloud or in the silence of your heart...

Taizé 'O Lord hear my prayer'

Light Candle 4

We light this candle as a sign of hope; hope for our hearts, hope for our world, and the hope promised to us by God in the Christmas story. We pray that God will lift and guide us when we cannot see the way. That God will teach us to know that a shadow is merely a shadow, because the light of eternal goodness always shines behind the object of our fears.

Where there is love in life, we pray God will help us to find it, help us to trust it and enable us to grow in the power of God's love.

God of all comfort, strengthen and be with us and all who are hurting and yearning for hope. Take a moment to remember those in need of hope

You are invited to say names aloud or in the silence of your heart...

Taizé 'O Lord hear my prayer'

Reflection

Music Hymn 718 'We cannot measure how you heal'

We cannot measure how you heal
or answer every sufferer's prayer,
yet we believe your grace responds
where faith and doubt unite to care.
Your hands, though bloodied on the cross,
survive to hold and heal and warn,
to carry all through death to life
and cradle children yet unborn.

The pain that will not go away,
the guilt that clings from things long past,
the fear of what the future holds are present as if meant to last.
But present too is love which tends
the hurt we never hoped to find,
the private agonies inside, the memories that haunt the mind.

So some have come who need your help
and some have come to make amends
as hands which shaped and saved the world
are present in the touch of friends.
Lord, let your Spirit meet us here
to mend the body, mind and soul,
to disentangle peace from pain
and make your broken people whole.

by John L Bell and Graham Maule

Invitation to individual candle lighting

May the hope of the Christ Child sustain us through all darkness.
That together we may shine again.

Prayer

God of comfort and compassion,
May all those we think of
be held firmly within your love.
In a time and in a world
where the fragility of our breath and life
has been exposed in new ways,
we remember those around the world
whose lives have been overturned by Covid

and other life-changing realities.
May they know comfort and healing,
may those who care for them and support them
know that their actions are deeply appreciated.
May we each do what we can
And, also, be gentle with our limitations and frailties.
As we prepare for the day
on which we give thanks for the sharp cry
of a child born to bring hope
to a world breathless in anguish,
thank you, Lord God,
for your gift of compassion to us,
for your indwelling breath of care,
that carries us ever onward.
Amen.

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Blessing

Shepherds watching over sheep,
Angels watching over shepherds,
Kings watching over stars,
Stars watching over kings...

And overseeing all is God, watching over everything,
Sheltering all under God's outstretched wing.

The Christmas story is an extravagant gesture of divine companionship
born through the sheer strength of God's love for us.

May you experience God with you this Christmas.
May you catch a glimpse of childlike wonder
and be inspired to consider the possibilities the sky might hold for you.
And, above all, may you know that you are sheltered under God's wing, this
night and always. Amen.

Music

Selection of pieces by Schubert, Handel, Mozart, C S Lang

Service Leaders: Pat McKerrow, Rosie Magee

Piano: Mary Godden

Scripture Reader: Heather Ferguson

Poem: Diana Thurston Smith

Prayer: Elizabeth Mackay

Blue Hearts: Diana Thurston Smith through 'Creative Together'

Tech Team: Mary Margaret Scott, Andrew Carvel, Susan McLarty

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