Blue Christmas Service Outline

What is a Blue Christmas Service?

'Blue Christmas,' a service specifically designed for those whose mood is 'blue' in this season.

The service itself is very simple – some music (perhaps a mixture of carols and/or just selected verses), a poem, readings and prayers which acknowledge pain and emptiness alongside the Christian hope; accompanied by a reflection which gently speaks of light in darkness. We have provided a suggested selection to aid you in your service preparation.

The length of the service is no more than 60 minutes, allowing for times of silence and not feeling rushed to fill every moment with word or song. We also stay seated throughout the whole service to avoid any embarrassment of knowing when to stand.

As people arrive, each is given a service sheet with all the words and instructions needed. Quiet music plays for about 10-15 minutes before the advertised start time with the leader in place to create a calm, safe atmosphere.

A large, unlit advent wreath of 5 candles and an empty chair provide the focal point at the front of the space. Music is played for 10 minutes before the service, and during the call to come forward and light candles.

Set Up – Tasks to Complete Prior to Service

- Prepare an empty chair and an Advent wreath of 5 candles, have this at the front.
- Prepare additional tea lights for participants to use, available at the front near the Advent wreath.
- Prepare an order of service for participants to use, print out for participants if applicable.
- Prepare a basket of blue Christmas tree ornaments to giveaway to those attending the service.
- Keep lighting as low as possible so that the room can be dark and private. Use candles to provide ambient light and/or consider using blue fairy lights.

Suggested Service Advertisement

Blue Christmas is a quiet service for anyone who finds it hard to buy into the forced merriment of Christmas, for anyone who wants space, a quiet place of reflection and for anyone for whom this might be a difficult time of year.

Order of Service

(Prelude: Have a playlist of quiet contemplative music playing in advance of guests arriving.)

Welcome

Christmas always seems to be accompanied by jolly songs, ringing tills, and the expectation that you will have a good time. But that is not how it feels for many of us. Maybe your year has been hard – for whatever reason (bereavement, illness, estrangement, worry) – and Christmas seems to highlight the difficulties. Or maybe in an overly busy life, you just want space to reflect, recall, regroup. Whatever the reason, whatever the need, you are welcome here. We hope that you will find the space and hope which the Christmas story offers.

We will be sharing a variety of music, readings, prayers, and reflections. We will light some candles and spend time in prayer and silence. You can participate (or not participate) in any way that you would like. We remain seated for the whole service, including the singing of carols. If you wish to, please join in the responses in prayers in bold type.

Call to Worship (based on Isaiah 40: 1-11)

We meet in the name of a loving God.
Who knows our needs, Hears our cries.
And heals our wounds.
Amen.

Prayer

Almighty God, we come as we are, bringing our hearts and all that we carry, looking for your light and your hope. Would you meet us in our darkness and give us freedom to struggle together as we seek your presence. In this safe space, we trust that you will meet us, offering comfort in our pain and clarity in our confusion. We ask for strength for today, courage for tomorrow and peace for the past.
Amen.

Hymn Introduction

We are going to sing In the Bleak Midwinter. This carol reflects the sense of longing and anticipation, similar to the way the Israelites awaited the promised deliverer. The lyrics evoke a sense of yearning for God's presence, and the imagery of a cold, desolate world mirrors our deep need for hope and salvation.

Please remain seated as we sing.

Hymn – In the Bleak Midwinter

1 In the bleak midwinter
frosty wind made moan,
earth stood hard as iron,
water like a stone:
snow had fallen,
snow on snow, snow on snow,
in the bleak midwinter,
long ago.

2 Our God, heaven cannot hold him,
nor earth sustain;
heaven and earth shall flee away
when he comes to reign:
in the bleak midwinter
a stable place sufficed
the Lord God Almighty,
Jesus Christ.

3 Enough for him whom cherubim
worship night and day,
a breastful of milk
and a mangerful of hay:
enough for him
whom angels fall down before,
the ox and ass and camel
which adore.

4 Angels and archangels
may have gathered there,
cherubim and seraphim
thronged the air,
but only his mother,
in her maiden bliss,
worshiped the Beloved
with a kiss.

5 What can I give him,
poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd,
I would bring a lamb,
if I were a wise man

I would do my part,
yet what I can I give him,
give my heart.

Author: Christina Georgina Rossetti (c. 1872). Tune: Cranham.

(Following the singing of the Hymn, the leader recites the poem below, providing a few words of introduction as desired.)

Poem - Winter Prayer: God's Timing

God of all seasons and senses,
grant us the sense of your timing
to submit gracefully
and rejoice quietly
in the turn of the seasons.

In this season of short days and long nights,
of grey and white and cold,
teach us the lessons of endings;
children growing, friends leaving,
loved ones dying, grieving over,
grudges over, blaming over, excuses over.

O God, grant us a sense of your timing.

In this season of short days and long nights,
of grey and white and cold,
teach us the lessons of beginnings;
that such waitings and endings
may be the starting place,
a planting of seeds which bring to birth
what is ready to be born—
something right and just and different,
a new song,
a deeper relationship, a fuller love—
in the fullness of your time.

O God, grant us a sense of your timing.

Author: Ted Loder, in Guerrillas of Grace

Second Hymn Introduction

Our next hymn is “O Come, O Come Emmanuel,” a hymn that speaks of our yearning for hope and light in times of darkness. I invite you to allow the words to resonate with your heart, offering a space to reflect, breathe, and find peace in God’s presence.

Hymn - O Come, O Come Emmanuel

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

Refrain:
Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.

2 O come, O Wisdom from on high,
who ordered all things mightily;
to us the path of knowledge show
and teach us in its ways to go. Refrain

3 O come, O come, great Lord of might,
who to your tribes on Sinai's height
in ancient times did give the law
in cloud and majesty and awe. Refrain

4 O come, O Branch of Jesse's stem,
unto your own and rescue them!
From depths of hell your people save,
and give them victory o'er the grave. Refrain

5 O come, O Key of David, come
and open wide our heavenly home.
Make safe for us the heavenward road
and bar the way to death's abode. Refrain

6 O come, O Bright and Morning Star,
and bring us comfort from afar!
Dispel the shadows of the night
and turn our darkness into light. Refrain

7 O come, O King of nations, bind
in one the hearts of all mankind.
Bid all our sad divisions cease
and be yourself our King of Peace. Refrain

Words: various, combined by unknown author approx. 12th Century, Translated by John Mason Neale, 1851. Music: 'Veni Emmanuel' 15th Century French processional. Setting: "Common Service Book" (ULCA), 1917. copyright: public domain.

Reading

In the beginning was the Word. The Word was close beside God, and the Word was God. In the beginning, he was close beside God. All things came into existence through him; not one thing that exists came into existence without him. Life was in him and this life was the light of the human race. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. John 1:1-5 (NTFE)

The Empty Chair

This empty chair represents those who will not be home for Christmas.

Perhaps a relationship has ended, perhaps the people we love that are far away, perhaps sickness or death has changed how things used to be…

(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.

Lord hear our prayer.

(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 was not supposed to be like that.

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

The loss of health,
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)

Lord hear our prayer.

(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 despite 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)

Lord hear our prayer.

(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.

(Light the central candle)

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

Jesus who was born as a helpless baby – and who hears our cries and understands how weak and helpless we can feel.

Jesus the good shepherd, who knows our hearts and offers us healing and hope in the midst of our suffering. Who came to help us understand just how much God loves us. And who lived and died to restore our relationship with our heavenly father.

Jesus who will reign as King over God's new creation, where there will be no more sickness or death or crying or pain, for all eternity. And who has given us his Holy Spirit

to help, comfort and guide us as we seek to follow him here on earth and wait for his glorious return.

Invitation To Light Candles

(Begin playing a piece of background music of your choosing.)

We have a number of candles here at the front and invite you to come up and light one as the music plays. You might light one in memory of a person who has passed away or is estranged. You might light one to honour your own courage which has not been extinguished. You might light one as a symbol of hope for brighter days ahead. Whatever your intention, we invite you to join us in this simple act of worship together.

(Music ends.)

Reflection

Offer a short homily on hope or a similar theme. Please feel free to use the Reflection below:

A Reflection of Hope for a Blue Christmas Service

As we gather today in this sacred space, we acknowledge the complex emotions that can surface during this season. For many, Christmas is a time of joy and celebration, but for others, it can be a period marked by grief, loss, and longing.

This service, often referred to as a "Blue Christmas" service, invites us to honour those feelings and find hope even in the midst of our struggles.

The Bleak Midwinter

We sang In the Bleak Midwinter, a hymn that resonates deeply with our human experience. The imagery of a cold, desolate winter reflects the moments in our lives when we feel isolated and overwhelmed. The opening lines remind us of the starkness of winter, evoking a sense of heaviness that many of us carry in our hearts.

Yet, even in this bleakness, the hymn speaks of the beauty of humility and simplicity. It tells us of the humble birth of Christ, born not in a palace but in a stable. This profound truth offers us hope: that even in our darkest moments, something beautiful can emerge. The hymn reminds us that God chose to enter our world in vulnerability, a powerful statement that resonates with those of us who feel fragile and broken.

Acknowledging Our Pain

As we reflect on these words, it is important to acknowledge the pain that can accompany Christmas time. As we lit our candles we acknowledged our struggles. In this space, we honour those feelings. We say it is okay to grieve, to feel a sense of longing, and to carry the weight of sorrow. Just as the hymn evokes the starkness of winter, we too can acknowledge the coldness that sometimes surrounds us.

Reflecting on "O Come, O Come Emmanuel"

This hymn expresses our deep longing for God to be present in our lives. "O come, O come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel."

These words capture the feeling many of us have in our struggles. It is all too easy to feel alone, but these words reassure us that we are never forgotten. Emmanuel means "God with us," reminding us that even in our darkest moments, God is right there beside us, sharing in our pain and offering comfort.

The refrain gently reminds us that hope does not come from the absence of challenges but from knowing that God's love surrounds us. In this season, let us open our hearts to that truth, allowing it to bring warmth and peace into our lives.

Finding Hope in the Waiting

The act of waiting can often feel heavy, but it is also where hope is born. In the stillness of our hearts, we can hear the promise of God's love breaking through our despair. The themes of both hymns we have sung urge us to embrace this waiting as a part of our journey. It is in this space that we learn to lean into God. We can sit with our sorrow, allowing it to be a part of our story whilst also making space for hope to emerge.

A Message of Light

As we navigate this blue Christmas, let us remember the light that breaks through the darkness. The birth of Christ is not just a historical event; it is a living promise that God is always with us, even in our pain. The light of Christ shines brightest in our moments of deepest need.

In O Come, O Come Emmanuel, we are reminded that we are called to be messengers of this hope. As we invite Emmanuel into our lives, we are also called to share that light with others. We can extend kindness, offer support, and be a listening ear for those who may also be struggling this season.

Conclusion

As we conclude our time together, I encourage you to embrace the complexity of our feelings this Christmas. Allow yourself to feel the weight of sorrow while holding onto the threads of hope woven throughout our hymns. Let In the Bleak Midwinter and O Come, O Come Emmanuel guide you in your journey, reminding you that God is with us in our waiting, our longing, and our grief.

May this Christmas, even in its blueness, bring you a renewed sense of hope. Let us carry the light of Emmanuel in our hearts and share it with the world, illuminating the darkness around us. Amen.

Closing

In a moment we will say the 23rd Psalm together and finish with a prayer. Then we will play one final piece of music and after that it will be quiet in this space. Please feel free to stay as long as you would like to.

As you leave, you will notice a basket of blue ornaments. Please feel free to take one, to remind you that God is with you in the midst of whatever you are going through.

Psalm 23 has brought comfort to so many people over the years, let us say it together now.

Scripture Reading - Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will 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 your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Psalm 23, (NIV)

Blessing

Lord, In the beginning
When all was very dark, you said: Let there be light.
And there was light.
And life throughout the universe.
And when the human race
Was exhausted, tired, and weary,
In the darkness of anxiety,

Confusion and sin,
Into that darkness you came
As light in Jesus Christ.

God became a human being among us all.
Once again it is dark.
Not just dark at midnight
But dark in ourselves:
Dark with doubt,
Dark with fear and uncertainty,
Dark with confusing and conflicting voices in our ears.

Come, Light of Life,
Lighten the darkness in our lives with your mighty word of love.
Lighten our hearts with the joy of your promised coming.
Lighten our world with the hope that faith in you brings.
We travel towards Christmas Day in the peace of Jesus Christ.

May his peace,
That lightens the soul with faith, lifts the spirit with hope,
And leavens the world with love, be yours tonight and always.

And the blessing of God,
The Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sustainer,
Go with you and remain with you now and always. Amen.

Closing Music

To end the service, play some music, not sung but playing in the background. It is suggested that you pick a piece of music with the theme of hope such as those suggested below:

- It Is Well With My Soul
- O Come Let Us Adore Him
- Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus
- Be Still My Soul
- Is He Worthy

(End of Service)