



CENTRAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

6300 Trinity Drive, Pine Bluff, Arkansas

Blue Christmas Service

ORDER OF WORSHIP

Thursday, December 21, 2023

OPENING PRAYER (TOGETHER)

Merciful God, In this season of rejoicing, we come to you weary and grieving. In this season of feasting, we hunger for healing and relief. In this season of light, our hearts are veiled in sorrow and shadow.

Will this season ever end?

“Yes.” We hear your, “Yes.”

Those who are weary will find rest. Those who mourn will be comforted.

Those who hunger will be filled. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it.

INVITATION TO CHRIST'S PRESENCE

ONE: We welcome you O Christ, Light of the World. In the midst of our suffering, help us to worship you in Spirit and in Truth.

ALL: Gracious God, as we go from this place, we trust in your company along our way. Wrap your everlasting arms around us; swaddle us in the security of your love; comfort us with the silence of your quiet breath; brighten our path with the light of your presence. Then, send us into the world.

HYMN # 88 “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

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

(Refrain) Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

**2 O come, thou Wisdom from on high, who orderest all things mightily, to
us the path of knowledge show; and teach us in her ways to go. [Refrain]**

**3 O come, O come, thou Lord of might, who to thy tribes on Sinai’s
height in ancient times didst give the law in cloud and majesty and
awe. [Refrain]**

**4 O come, thou Root of Jesse, free thine own from Satan’s tyranny;
from depths of hell thy people save and give them victory o’er the grave.
[Refrain]**

LIGHTING OF THE CANDLES OF OUR SUFFERINGS

Light one candle

ONE: This candle signifies our suffering and the suffering of the world. In the light of God’s love, we claim God’s gift of truth. There is no need to hide or deny. God welcomes us as we are.

**ALL: Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.
(Psalm 86:1)**

Light one candle

ONE: This candle signifies our suffering and the suffering of the world. In the light of God’s love, we claim God’s gift of lament. We recognize our wounds and cry out to God. We accept God’s invitation to express every feeling and question.

**ALL: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far
from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day,
but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest. (Psalm 22:1-2)**

Light one candle

ONE: This candle signifies our suffering and the suffering of the world. In the light of God’s love, we claim God’s gift of courage. Courage to be honest, to seek help, to comfort one another. Courage to dare to love and dream again.

ALL: The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts; so I am helped, and my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him. (Psalm 28:7)

Light one candle

ONE: This candle signifies our suffering and the suffering of the world. In the light of God's love, we claim God's gift of hope. God is good. God is strong. God is near, leading us to a day without tears and pain, without sin and death. Healing and deliverance are coming; if not now, then on that day.

ALL: By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation; you are the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas. (Psalm 65:5)

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

ONE: Gracious God, in this season of Advent, we give thanks that you came to be among us: Emmanuel, God with us. You came into the darkness of that time; a time of change and stress, uncertainty and doubt. You did not enter this world surrounded by grand things. You were born in a stable, to parents far from home. O God, we pray for your presence here and now, in the difficulties of our time. We lay before you our offerings of honesty and need, of worry and hope. For all who are grieving, we pray:

ALL: O Lord, you know what it means to lose someone you dearly love.

ONE: For all who are lonely, we pray:

ALL: O Lord, you know how it feels to look around you and feel that there is no one left.

ONE: For all who are anxious, we pray:

ALL: O Lord, you know what it is like to be weary and heavy-laden.

ONE: For all who are vulnerable, we pray:

ALL: O Lord, you know what it means to be unhoused and unsafe.

ONE: For all who are beset by challenges, physical or emotional, we pray:

ALL: O Lord, you know how it feels to be in pain.

ONE: For all who are longing for light, and for hope, we pray:

ALL: O Lord, you know what it is like to wait in the darkness.

(Here we offer our personal petitions in silence.)

ONE: Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you that you came to be among us, full of grace and truth. In you, we find our welcome.

ALL: You are our comfort and our company along the journey of our life.

ONE: In Jesus' name, we pray.

Together: Amen.

HYMN # 836 Abide with Me (Verses 1, 2, 3)

1 Abide with me: fast falls the eventide; the darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide. When other helpers fail and comforts flee, Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

2 Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day; earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away. Change and decay in all around I see. O thou who changest not, abide with me.

3 I need thy presence every passing hour. What but thy grace can foil the tempter's power? Who like thyself my guide and strength can be? Through clouds and sunshine, O abide with me.

BLESSING