



Blue  
Christmas



Saint  
Francis  
Parish

# *The Longest Night:*

## *A Blue Christmas Service*

We greet you in the name of our Christ and offer you His love and embrace. Today we gather for a Blue Christmas Service; 'blue' as in the blues, or "I am feeling blue." We recognize that not everyone is emotionally up and cheery for the Christmas holidays. Dealing with the pandemic, the fear, the loss of normal social interactions, as well as perhaps the death of a loved one, facing life after divorce or separation, coping with the loss of a job, living with cancer, or some other disease that puts a question mark over the future, and a number of other human situations make parties and joviality painful for many people in our parishes and communities.

There is a growing attentiveness to the needs of people who are feeling blue, or a little down, at Christmastime. Increasing numbers of churches are creating sacred space for people living through dark times. Such services are reflective, accepting where we really are, and holding out healing and hope. And that is why Saint Francis is holding this *The Longest Night Service*, taking place near the actual Winter Solstice, the longest day of the year, with the year's least amount of daylight. *Symbols not to be lost or overlooked.*

There is also an interesting convergence for this day as we combine today's service with a traditional Mass on a Sunday. This linkage invites making some connections between our own struggle to believe the tale of Jesus' resurrection, the long nights just before Christmas, and the struggle with darkness and grief faced by those living with loss and the reality that today, in the Sacrifice of the Mass, God comes and is made manifest and real. His Presence is felt in new ways today to remind us that we are loved and safe.

This service will be a time of prayer, simple poems, embracing music selections, and reflection. We also offer the Anointing of the Sick and/or blessing prayers to all who attend, if desired. On this holy day, we remember all for whom the holidays are not joyful as this is a service of wholeness and healing in mid-December, perhaps better explained this way:

"Comfort, comfort my people, says God"

Welcome to Saint Francis...

Father Greg, Pastor



## *Service Liturgy*

*The Sanctuary, with the Advent Wreath present, is used for this service. The Sanctuary is intentionally dimly lit with candles and Altar Candles being the predominate source of light. The ministers enter in silence, before the special prelude hymn, to join the gathered in solidarity as one.*

### **Prelude Music**

### **The Welcome**

*Welcome to this Longest Night, A Blue Christmas Service. "The name comes from the season - during this season in*

December, we experience the shortest day and the longest night of the year. But the name also applies to the feeling that a number of us have about this season, especially in the world we are now simply enduring. It is the "long dark night of the soul," "the winter of our discontent," in which memories of past experiences and the pain of present experiences can become overwhelming.

For some, Christmas Day is the most difficult. For others, Christmas Eve, or New Year's Eve, or the beginning of another lonely New Year. And, for most of us, the pandemic and all the complications of the world today are simply too much. We need a rest. Today, it is here.

In today's service, we will have some singing appropriate to the season, recognizing that this is not necessarily a season of joy. We will invite you to meditate on the pain and anguish you may bring, and to offer your pain to the Christ child. And we trust that you will find hope and comfort here in knowing that you - that we - are never alone.

### **Gathering Hymn**

Priest: In the Name of the Father, and of the  Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: **Amen.**

Priest: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

All: **The Word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth, and we have seen his glory.**

Priest: In him was life, and that life was the light of all.

All: **The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never been able to extinguish it.**

## Advent Wreath Lighting

*A minister, or another appointed person, enters bearing a candle and places it on the center of the Altar while the hymn is sung. From that light - a representative gift from the gathered community - the Advent Wreath and then the Christ Candle is lighted. In doing so, we recognize that even in our darkest days, particularly when the light is so very difficult to see, Christ is still present and is still the center of our lives. Christ hears our pain and offers us hope and healing.*

## WAITING ON THE THRESHOLD FOR OUR LIVES TO RETURN...

**Reader One:** We live on the brink every day. We stand on the threshold between this world and the next one. We live and move between the ordinary and divine, between the mundane and the mystery. Too often, we forget to look up and see the angels in our living room. We forget that the love we give and live is a sign of eternity, God with us, right now. We forget that company is coming.

**Reader Two:** Luke tells us that God's favor came to a girl, an ordinary girl. It might have been you or your daughter; it might have been the girl down the street or your grandchild. But the messenger of God came and greeted her and said, "The Lord is with you."

What a gift and a promise: Emmanuel, God is with us.

**Reader One:** We light these candles with peace in our hearts for the promise of proximity, the nearness of God. How we long to be normal again and closer to God! Even when we forget to listen, to lean into that presence, God is as close as our own breath. This, in a confused and confusing world, is a peace that passes all understanding. It is the peace that knows that company is coming.

**Reader Two:** O Come, O Come Emmanuel.

## The Pardon

Priest: Lord Jesus, you are mighty God and Prince of peace: Lord, have mercy.

**All: Lord, have mercy.**

Priest: Lord Jesus, you are the Son of God and Son of Mary: Christ, have mercy.

**All: Christ, have mercy.**

Priest: Lord Jesus, you are Word made flesh and splendor of the Father: Lord, have mercy.

**All: Lord, have mercy.**

Priest: May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.

**All: Amen.**

## Opening Prayer:

Priest: Let us pray.

Priest: Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord, your grace into our hearts, that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ your Son was made known by the message of an Angel, may by his Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of his Resurrection. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God,

for ever and ever.

**All:**           **Amen.**

## Scripture Readings:

**Leader:**     In our first reading, Job doesn't get a visit from the portly, comforting Clarence the angel. Instead, the One who appears to Job is none other than the Creator of the cosmos, the LORD God Almighty, and God doesn't come to comfort Job. Instead, God lays into Job, lecturing him from the center of a cyclone! God takes Job on a whirlwind tour of creation, beginning with the foundation of the earth, and the birth of the Sea. This speech of God, found the end of the book of Job, may leave many readers dissatisfied.

We want God to tell Job about the wager with the Satan. We want God to apologize for all of Job's suffering. We want God to be at least, well, comforting. Instead, in the words of William Safire: "It's as if God appears in a tie-dyed T-shirt emblazoned with the words 'Because I'm God, That's Why.'"

## First Reading: Job 38:1-41, 40:1

**Reader:**     A reading from the book of Job.

**T**hen the LORD answered Job out of the storm and said: Who is this who darkens counsel with words of ignorance? Gird up your loins now, like a man; I will question you, and you tell me the answers! Where were you when I founded the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its size? Surely you know? Who stretched out the measuring line for it? Into what were its pedestals sunk, and who laid its cornerstone, While the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Who shut within doors the sea, when it burst forth from the womb, When I made the clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling bands? When I set limits for it and fastened the bar of its door, And said: Thus far shall you come but no farther, and here shall your proud waves stop? Have you ever in your

lifetime commanded the morning and shown the dawn its place for taking hold of the ends of the earth, till the wicked are shaken from it? Do you know the ordinances of the heavens; can you put into effect their plan on the earth? Can you raise your voice to the clouds, for them to cover you with a deluge of waters? Can you send forth the lightnings on their way, so that they say to you, “Here we are”? Who gives wisdom to the ibis, and gives the rooster understanding? Who counts the clouds with wisdom? Who tilts the water jars of heaven So that the dust of earth is fused into a mass and its clods stick together? Do you hunt the prey for the lion or appease the hunger of young lions, While they crouch in their dens, or lie in ambush in the thicket? Who provides nourishment for the raven when its young cry out to God, wandering about without food?

Reader: The Word of the Lord.

**All: Thanks be to God.**

### **Collective Lament: Lamentations 3:1-15, 19-21**

Reader: I am one who has known grief under the rod of the Most High's anger.

**All: I am the one who was led away—Left to walk in the night, far away from the light.**

Reader: The hand of God has been turned against me, again and again, both day and night. God has torn away my skin and muscle and broken my bones.

**All: God has surrounded me and besieged me with bitterness and calamity**

Reader: God has cast me out into the darkness like those long dead. God has walled me in—there is no escape—And weighed me down with shackles.

**All: Even when I call out for help, God ignores my plea. God has obstructed my path with huge boulders And blocked my every step.**

Reader: God lies in wait for me like a bear Or like a lion prowling its prey, Forcing me into the briars—

**All: Throwing me to the ground and leaving me in anguish. The Most High has bent the bow; I am the target for God's arrows.**

Reader: God has pierced my heart with shafts from the quiver. Everybody laughs at me; I am the butt of their songs all day. God has filled me with bitter herbs, and sated me with gall. I remember my woes and wanderings—The wormwood and the gall.

**All: Those memories are so clear to me, And they fill me with despair. Yet, it is because I remember all this: That I have hope.**

## Second Reading: Romans 16:25-27

Reader: A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

**B**rothers and sisters: To him who can strengthen you, according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret for long ages but now manifested through the prophetic writings and, according to the command of the eternal God, made known to all nations to bring about the obedience of faith, to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Reader: The Word of the Lord.

**All: Thanks be to God.**

## Gospel: Luke 1:26-38

Priest or Deacon: The Lord be with you.

**All: And with your spirit.**

Priest or Deacon: A reading from Holy Gospel according to Saint Luke..

**All: Glory to you, O Lord!**

**T**he angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary.

And coming to her, he said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

"Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?"

And the angel said to her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God."

Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Priest: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

## **Short Reflection: Father Greg**

**Amazing Peace by Dr Maya Angelou read by Subdeacon  
Luna**

## Prayer of the Faithful - *Sit*

*The Lector and/or Presider will guide the Assembly on the proper prayer response for the particular Mass. On some occasions, the petitions and responses are sung and the Leader will help guide the Assembly. The response is:*

**All:** Lord, hear our prayers.

## Preparation of the Altar and the Gifts - *Sit*

### Prayer over the Gifts

Priest: Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received ...

**All:** **Blessed be God forever.**

Priest: Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received ...

**All:** **Blessed be God forever.**

### Orate, Fratres

Priest: Pray, Beloved, that our sacrifice may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.

**All:** **May the Lord accept the sacrifice at our hands for the praise and glory of God's name, for our good and the good of all God's holy Church.**

## Prayer Over the Offerings - *Stand*

## Preface Dialogue - *Remain Standing*

Priest: The Lord be with you.

All: **And also with you.**

Priest: Lift up your hearts.

All: **We lift them up to the Lord.**

Priest: Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.

All: **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

## Sanctus

All: **Holy, holy, holy Lord God of hosts,  
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.  
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.**

## The Eucharistic Prayer - *Kneel*

### Mystery of Faith

Priest: The mystery of faith:

*One of the following is used:*

All: **When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim  
your death, O Lord, until you come again.**

*As we prepare to receive Holy Communion, as a Community of God, we come together to pray in the words that Jesus taught us, The Lord's Prayer. We pray for the Lord to give us our daily bread. We also ask for forgiveness for our errors, and where we have fallen short, and we ask that we be strengthened to do God's will. This is a time for all to gather as one and offer our deepest intentions in prayer and hope.*

## Our Father - Stand

Priest: At the Savior's command and formed by divine teaching, we dare to say:

All:

**Dur 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.**

Priest:

**Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil, graciously grant peace in our days, that, by the help of your mercy, we may be always free from sin and safe from all distress, as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.**

All: **For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever.**

*The fraction rite is the breaking of the bread that has become the Body of Christ. In offering His life for us on the Cross, Jesus has become the Lamb of God that is offered for our sins. As the priest breaks the bread, the people sing the Lamb of God, acknowledging Jesus' sacrifice on the cross that takes away our sins.*

## Lamb of God

All: **Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world: have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world: have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world: grant us peace.**

Priest: Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.

**All:**            **Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof,  
but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.**

## **Communion**

*All are welcome to receive Holy Communion at Saint Francis. As Catholics, the reception of Holy Communion is a sign of our unity in faith and life in the Catholic Church. We believe in the real Presence of Christ at the Table. Therefore, when you receive the consecrated Bread, please respond with your affirmation, "Amen!" You may receive the Bread in your hands crossed over one another. If, for any reason, you do not wish to receive communion, please simply fold your arms across your chest and receive a blessing as you pass.*

## **Period of Silence**

*When the distribution of Holy Communion is completed, the Presider retires to the Presidium, and we honor a period of silence for prayer. A meditation hymn may also be offered. We end the Communion Rite with a prayer that we will be strengthened and transformed by the Holy Communion we have just received as a community of faith.*

## **Prayer after Communion - Sit**

Priest:        The Lord be with you.

**All:**            **And with your spirit.**

Priest:        Let us pray.

*[All pray in silence. The priest then says a Prayer after communion and all say,]*

**All: Amen.**

## **Announcements**

*Certain timely announcements are highlighted by the Presider, briefly, for the benefit of the gathered community. The concluding rites include the final blessing, the dismissal (Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life), the kissing of the altar by the priest and deacon and the recessional. We go out into the world to "love and serve the Lord."*

# *Concluding Rites*

Priest: The Lord be with you.

All: **And with your spirit.**

## **A Franciscan Blessing**

Priest: May God bless you with discomfort at half-truths, easy answers, and superficial relationships, so that you will live deeply and from the heart.

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and the exploitation of people, so that you will work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those in pain, so that you will reach out your hand to them and turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with just enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this old world, so that you will do those things that others say cannot be done.

May almighty God bless you, +++ Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

All: **Amen.**

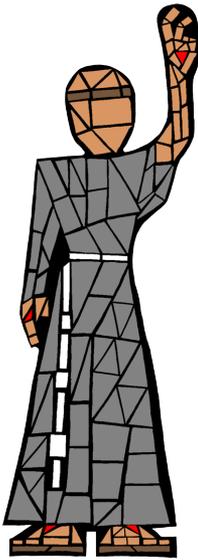
## **Dismissal**

Deacon: Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.

All: **Thanks be to God!**

## **Closing Hymn**





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