

ST. MATTHEW LUTHERAN CHURCH



**A Holiday Worship Service for those who are
Stressed, Hurting, Grieving or Lonely
in this Holiday Season.**

**Sunday, December 20, 2020
3:00 p.m.**

WELCOME! ARE YOU NEW? We are a group of people gathered together to make a difference. We seek to make a difference in ourselves, in our neighborhoods, and in our world. We are thankful that you are here today. Check out our website at *www.stmattlutheran.org*, where you can find out more about us and get connected into our community. **If you would like a call from one of the pastors, give a pastor or usher your name and phone number and a pastor will contact you, or call the church office, 717-637-7101, and leave a message for Pastor Kathy or Pastor David.**

Out of respect for the health and safety of all members, we respectfully require the wearing of masks and the practice of social distancing (6 feet). If you have forgotten your facemask, one will be provided.

Please tear off and put in the basket as you leave:

Names of everyone attending Sunday, December 20, 2020, at 3 p.m:

Would you like to be added to our email list? Please list your name and email address: _____

Please list any prayer concerns you would like lifted up by the staff:

PRELUDE

Infant Holy, Infant Lowly

Thygerson

WELCOME

Pastor: Today we welcome you to our Blue Christmas service, a service that has been put together especially for those of us who are not feeling particularly merry and bright right now.

Despite all the decorations, cards, music playing in the stores, the concerts and parties and TV commercials who want us to believe that when we buy their products, we will feel better and our troubles and worries will somehow disappear, we still feel empty.

We hope that you'll find this a safe place to be transparent with yourself and with God, a safe place to admit that maybe you're not ok at the moment, that maybe what you're really feeling is sad, discouraged, or even angry. A place for you to be real with your struggles and your questions.

Those of us feeling a little blue at this time of year can feel edged out and forgotten as everyone else seems caught up in the mad frenzy of their own preparations and celebrations. We hope that as you look around tonight, and as you think about the Christmas message, you'll find comfort and hope in knowing that you are not alone.

PRAYER

Pastor: God of mercy and love, we gather here today as hurting people, bringing our pain, our sorrow and our confusion to

this safe space. Loving God, meet us in our darkness, and give us freedom to struggle together as we seek your presence. We ask for strength for today, courage for tomorrow and peace from the past.

All: Amen.

LIGHT THE CHRIST CANDLE

SCRIPTURE *John 1:1-5* In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

THE EMPTY CHAIR

Pastor: This empty chair represents those who won't be home for Christmas.

Perhaps a relationship has ended, perhaps the people we love will be far away, perhaps family relationships are strained, perhaps sickness or death and the threat of Covid has changed how things used to be...

LIGHT THE FIRST CANDLE

Pastor: We light this first candle to remember those we have loved and lost and those who are not able to be with us.

We pause to remember their names, their faces, their voices and the memories of them that we hold in our hearts.

[Silent reflection]

Pastor: We thank God for them and ask for God's comfort, and when we are feeling overcome with sadness, we ask for the peace that is greater than we can ever understand.

All: Lord hear our prayer.

LIGHT THE SECOND CANDLE

Pastor: 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 wasn't supposed to be like this.

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

The loss of health,
employment,
independence,
freedom,
the loss of confidence or security,
plans that did not work out,
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.

[Silent reflection]

All: Lord hear our prayer.

LIGHT THE THIRD CANDLE

Pastor: 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 in the depths of our pain.

We pause now for you to tell the God who longs to take you by the hand and say to you, “Do not fear, I will help you find hope and courage for another day.”

[Silent reflection]

All: Lord hear our prayer.

LIGHT THE FOURTH CANDLE

Pastor: 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.

[Silent reflection]

Pastor: We thank you God for sending your Son Jesus so that we are never alone. And we thank you for sending others who are your hands and heart.

All: Amen.

FOCUS ON THE CHRIST CANDLE

Pastor: Standing here in the center of the candles that represent some of life's joy and pain, this Christ candle represents Jesus who has come to be Emmanuel, God with us, in the midst of it all.

Jesus who was born as a helpless baby – but 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, 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; 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.

Pastor: The carol before us expresses the longing the Israelites felt as they waited for God to send the deliverer He had promised. As you listen, we invite you to sit and rest in God's healing presence.

HYMN

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel
(Please hum or follow along silently)

**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 you, O Israel.**

**O come, O Dayspring, come and cheer; O Sun of justice, now draw near
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadow put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.**

**O come, O King of nations, come, O Cornerstone that binds in one:
refresh the hearts that long for you; restore the broken, make us new.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.**

PRAYER

Pastor: Let's pray. Oh God, be with us in our darkness. Make your face shine upon us and give us peace.

We pray for your Holy Spirit to be at work within us as we are gathered here today. May your Holy Spirit comfort us, sustain us and remind us of your constant love.

We open our hearts and minds to listen to you. Help us hear what you have to say.

All: Amen.

SCRIPTURE: PSALM 139

Lord you have searched me out and known me.

You know my sitting down and my rising up. You discern my thoughts from afar.

You trace my journeys and my resting places and are acquainted with all my ways. Indeed, there is not a word on my lips, but you, O lord, know it altogether. You press upon me, behind and before and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is so high that I cannot attain to it.

Where can I go then from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I climb up to heaven, you are there. If I make the grave my bed, you're there also. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell on the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand will lead me and your right hand hold me fast.

If I say, surely the darkness will cover me and the light around me turn to night, darkness is not dark to you. The night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light to you are both alike.

For you yourself created my inmost parts. You knit me together in my mother's womb. I will thank you because I am marvelously made. Your works are wonderful and I know it well. My body was not hidden from you while I was being made in secret and woven in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes beheld my unborn limbs, yet unfinished in the womb. All of them were written in your book. They were fashioned day by day when as yet there was none of them.

How deep I find your thoughts, O God, how great is the sum of them!

If I were to count them, they would be more in number than the sand. To count them all, my life span would need to be like yours... and when I come to the end, I am still with you.

HOMILY

Pastor Faye Snyder

SOLO

Christmas Dreams

Sorenson

**On that Christmas night when mystic stars shone bright,
a wistful blind man moved in sleep, and dreamed that he had sight.**

**That night when shepherds heard an angel choir near,
a deaf man stirred in slumber's spell, and dreamed that he could hear.**

**Child of healing, Child of hope, take the things that hurt us most,
and with Your touch they'll be redeemed, Holy Child of Christmas dreams.**

**On that night in cattle stall, a King slept through the cold.
A cripple turned his twisted limbs, and dreamed that he was whole.
He dreamed.**

**That night when o'er the Babe, young Mary rose to lean,
a loathsome leper smiled in sleep and dreamed that he was clean.
Child of healing, child of hope, take the things that hurt us most,
and with Your touch, they'll be redeemed,
Holy Child of Christmas dreams.**

**That night in manger lay the Child who came to save.
A man moved in the sleep of death, and dreamed there was no grave.
Child of healing, Child of hope, take the things that hurt us most,
and with Your touch they'll be redeemed,
Holy Child of Christmas dreams.
Holy Child of Christmas dreams.**

LIGHTING OF INDIVIDUAL CANDLES

Pastor: In a moment we are going to play a song which expresses this resolve to reach out and take hold of God's promise to be there with us in the midst of life's storms.

While the music is playing, you're invited to light a candle to represent whatever pain or loss you're experiencing. The Christ candle represents Jesus, as a way of saying thank you to Him for being the light in our darkness. As you light your candle, ask for God's help in trusting Him to help you in the midst of your pain and loss and to have hope. We will listen

to this song by Casting Crowns as a meditation while our
candles are lit.

REFLECTIVE MUSIC

Praise You in the Storm

Casting Crowns

I was sure by now God,
you would have reached down
And wiped our tears away
Stepped in and saved the day
But once again, I say "Amen," and it's still raining
As the thunder rolls
I barely hear your whisper through the rain
"I'm with you"
And as your mercy falls
I raise my hands and praise the God who gives
And takes away

And I'll praise you in this storm
And I will lift my hands
For you are who you are
No matter where I am

And every tear I've cried
You hold in your hand
You never left my side
And though my heart is torn
I will praise you in this storm

I remember when
I stumbled in the wind
You heard my cry to you
And raised me up again
My strength is almost gone

How can I carry on
If I can't find you

But as the thunder rolls
I barely hear your whisper through the rain
"I'm with you"
and as your mercy falls
I raise my hands and praise the God who gives
And takes away

And I'll praise you in this storm
And I will lift my hands
For you are who you are
No matter where I am

And every tear I've cried
You hold in your hand
You never left my side
And though my heart is torn
I will praise you in this storm

I lift my eyes unto the hills
Where does my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord
The maker of Heaven and Earth

And I'll praise you in this storm
And I will lift my hands

For you are who you are
No matter where I am

And every tear I've cried
You hold in your hand
You never left my side

And though my heart is torn
I will praise you in this storm
Though my heart is torn
(Though my heart is torn)
I will praise you in this storm
(Praise you in this storm)

PSALM 23

- 1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want;**
- 2 he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters;**
- 3 he restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.**
- 4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me**
- 5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies; thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows.**
- 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.**

PRAYER

Pastor: Comforting God, as we leave this place would you continue to wrap us in your presence. Be with us in our struggles, and when we get lost in the darkness, shine your light and help us find our way back to you.

All: Amen.

HYMN

Silent Night, Holy Night!

(Please hum or follow along silently)

Silent night, holy night! All is calm, all is bright
round yon virgin mother and child,
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.

silent night, holy night! Shepherds quake at the sight;
glories stream from heaven afar,
heavenly hosts sing, alleluia!
Christ the Savior, is born! Christ, the Savior, is born!

Silent night, holy night! Son of God,
love's pure light radiant beams from your holy face,
with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at your birth, Jesus, Lord, at your birth.

BENEDICTION

Pastor: May the power of God and the mystery of God go before us,
to show us the way,
shine above us to lighten our world,
lie beneath us to bear us up,

walk with us and give us companionship,
and shine within us to bring us joy.

All: Amen.

POSTLUDE

It Came upon the Midnight Clear

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A word of thanks to Doug West for recording this service to enable people to see it when they could not be with us in church.



**Please note: Music for this service is covered under CCLI # 1000682 –
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