

ST. MATTHEW LUTHERAN CHURCH

A horizontal banner with a blue background. On the left, the words "Blue Christmas" are written in a white, serif font. To the right of the text, there are three lit blue candles of varying heights, with their flames glowing. The background is decorated with white snowflakes and starburst patterns.

Blue Christmas

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

**Monday, December 2, 2024
6:30 p.m.**

Welcome! *We gather as a community for worship around word, wine, and water. Put another way, in worship we meet Christ in scripture proclaimed in speech & song, in the sacraments of Holy Communion and Baptism celebrated or remembered, and in community gathered together.*



Our regular weekend schedule includes Saturday worship at 5 p.m., Sunday indoor worship at 8:30 a.m., and Sunday indoor worship at 10:30 a.m. (livestreamed).

Blue Christmas Service 2024

PRELUDE

In the Bleak Midwinter

Martin

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 this afternoon, 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.

SOLO

Breath of Heaven
Madison Maloney

Grant

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.

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

HYMN

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

**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.**

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.

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.

OLD TESTAMENT: Psalm 139:1-12

¹O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

²You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.

³You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.

⁴Even before a word is on my tongue,
O LORD, you know it completely.

⁵You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.

⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

⁷Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?

⁸If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

⁹If I take the wings of the morning and
settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

¹⁰even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.

¹¹If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night,"

¹²even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

GOSPEL: Matthew 11:28-30

²⁸"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

HOMILY

Pastor Alex Sheppard-Witt

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 **Madison Maloney, Soloist**

Hall/Herms

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)

WE ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER

**God did not wait till the world was ready,
till nations were at peace.**

**God came when the Heavens were unsteady
and prisoners cried out for release.**

God did not wait for the perfect time.

God came when the need was deep and great.
God dined with sinners in all their grime,
turned water into wine.
God did not wait till hearts were pure.
In joy God came to a tarnished world of sin and doubt.
To a world like ours, of anguished shame,
God came and God's Light would not go out.
God came to a world which did not mesh;
to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.
In the mystery of the Word made Flesh,
the Maker of the stars was born.
We cannot wait till the world is sane
to raise our songs with joyful voice,
For to share our grief, to touch our pain,
God came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!

Adapted from the poem First Coming by Madeleine L'Engle.

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!

**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

Toccata on Veni Emmanuel

Andrew Carter

* * * * *

Our warm thanks to all those assisting in this worship service:

Musician.....Ben Boellner, Pianist and Organist
Soloist.....Madison Maloney
Ushers Ardis Kunde, Debbie Riddle, Linda Wheeler

CHRISTMAS SCHEDULE

- Dec. 21 5:00 p.m. Saturday Worship Service (Nave)
- Dec. 22 8:30 a.m. Worship Service (Nave)
- Dec. 22 9:30 a.m. Fellowship Hour with Coffee & Cookies
(Fellowship Hall)
- Dec. 22 10:30 a.m. Worship Service (Nave)
- Dec. 24 Christmas Eve Services:**
- 4:30 p.m. Family Service
- 7:00 p.m. Candlelight & Carol Service
- 9:30 p.m. Candlelight & Carol Service
- Dec. 25, 26 & 27 Church Office Closed**
- Dec. 28 5:00 p.m. Worship Service (Fellowship Hall)
- 5:45 p.m. Food
- 6:30 p.m. Mini-Minister Puppet Show
- Dec. 29 9:30 a.m. Worship Service (Nave)
- Jan. 1 Church Office Closed**





Community Meal

DECEMBER COMMUNITY MEAL

Sunday, December 15, 3:00-6:00 p.m.

Join us for our December Community Meal. There will be classic holiday foods (think turkey, ham, filling, corn, potatoes, rolls, and desserts), bingo, crafts, and puppets. This event is free and open to all!

If you are able to help, please email Amy Beck (Abeck1976@comcast.net). We will need help setting up, preparing food, serving the meal, cleaning up, making centerpieces, taking pictures, and much more.

 **You Are Welcome in our GriefShare Group.**

- Be with other people who are grieving. You don't need to be alone in your grief!
- This is a safe place where you can be yourself.
- You can say exactly how you feel to others who understand your pain.
- Your participation in this group will change you.

Robin Proctor Culp says, *"This class was amazing. I highly recommend it. I was in the first class in January and it truly opened my eyes and heart."*

Our 13-session GriefShare support group is scheduled to begin **Monday, February 17, 2025 6:30-8 p.m.** St. Matthew in the Upper Room, located on the 2nd floor. The room can be reached by elevator or stairs from the glass doors on Franklin Street.

To register, call the church office, 717-637-7101. If you have questions, you may email Pastor Faye at nicksong@comcast.net or call her at 717-451-0851.

Name _____ Phone # _____

Address _____

Christmas Gift Bags

**Who in your life has had a difficult year and needs to be cheered up?
Relative? Friend? Fellow Church Member? Co-worker?**



Gift Bags

You can help cheer them up by supplying information below. We will deliver Gift Bags (fruit, candy, cookies, Christmas ornament, and more) to folks in grief, lost their job, sick, injured, lonely, sad or upset for ANY reason.

Please help us locate them.

**Not limited to St. Matthew members, but MUST be
located within 15 miles of Hanover.**

Questions? Submitting a recipient? Helping to pack or deliver?
Contact Pastor Faye through the office, or at *nicksong@comcast.net*.
Or drop filled-out form into offering basket by **Deadline December 11.**

Recipient Name _____

Recipient Address _____

Recipient Phone number _____

Your name _____

Your phone number _____

Help pack on December 22? _____ Help Deliver on December 22? _____

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