

**Blue Christmas Service
First Reformed Church
December 22, 2013**

We Approach God

Prelude

“Allegretto” – Handel

Caleb McIver, Violin

Welcome

Call to Worship

How indeed do we say love? For our hearts are bound by the memories we know.
God first loved us, and drew us to himself that we might know love and come alive.

And so we come again to find the heart of God.

We gather to praise God for the gift of life

And do not know what to say, and so we sing.

We gather remembering the loss of our loved ones,

And do not know what to say, and so we sing.

We gather in thankfulness for the gift of love,

And do not know what to say, and so we sing.

Our God of the loving heart is always ready to have our hearts mended, filled and opened
again to the wonders of life – and so we sing.

Advent Carol: “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 thee, O Israel.*

*O Come thou Friend, thy presence share the load of grief and pain we bear.
Wipe thou our tears as we face fears. In our dark night, Lord, hold us near.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

*O Son of God who-m we love, look down in mercy from above.
Help us to meet challenges each day, help us to hear the words you say.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

*O Gift of God may we receive your joy and grace as we believe.
Help us to grow, your love to know, and may your peace our hearts o'er flow.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel. Amen.*

Opening Prayer

Lighting the Advent Wreath

Leader: This first candle we light to remember those whom we have loved and lost.
(First candle is lit. Offer silent prayers.) We pause to remember their name, their face, their voice, the memory that binds them to us in this season.

People: May God's eternal love surround them.

Leader: The second candle we light is to redeem the pain of loss; the loss of relationship, the loss of jobs, the loss of health. (Second candle is lit. Offer silent prayers.) We pause to gather up the pain of the past and offer it to God, asking that from God's hands we receive the gift of peace.

People: Refresh, restore, renew us O God, and lead us into your future.

Leader: The third candle we light is to remember ourselves this Christmas season. We pause and remember the past weeks and months; the disbelief, the anger, the down times, the poignancy of reminiscing, the hugs and handshakes of friends and family, all those who stood with us. (Third candle is lit. Offer silent prayers.) We give thanks for all the support we have known.

People: Let us remember that dawn defeats the darkness.

Leader: The fourth candle is lit to remember our faith and the gift of hope that the Christmas story offers to us. (Fourth candle is lit. Offer silent prayers.) We remember that God who shares our life promises us a time and place of no more pain and suffering.

People: Let us remember the one who shows us the way, who brings the truth and who bears the light. Amen.

Ministry of Music

"Andante" – Handel

Caleb McIver - Violin

God's Word to Us

Old Testament Reading

Exodus 2:23 – 3:8a

Responsive Psalm #12

Psalm 42

(p. 480 hymnal)

Gospel Reading

Luke 2:1-20

We Respond to God

An Advent Litany of Darkness and Light

Voice 1: We wait in the darkness, expectantly, longingly, anxiously, thoughtfully.

Voice 2: The darkness is our friend. In the darkness of the womb, we have all been nurtured and protected. In the darkness of the womb, the Christ-child was made ready for the journey into light.

**All: You are with us, O God,
in darkness and in light.**

Voice 1: It is only in the darkness that we can see the splendor of the universe – blankets of stars, the solitary glowing of distant planets.

Voice 2: It was the darkness that allowed the Magi to find the star that guided them to where the Christ-child lay.

**All: You are with us, O God,
in darkness and in light.**

Voice 1: In the darkness of sleep, we are soothed and restored, healed and renewed.

Voice 2: In the darkness of sleep, dreams rise up. God spoke to Jacob and Joseph through dreams. God is speaking still.

**All: You are with us, O God,
in darkness and in light.**

Voice 1: In the solitude of darkness, we sometimes remember those who need God's presence in a special way – the sick, the unemployed, the bereaved, the persecuted, the homeless; those who are demoralized and discouraged, those whose fear has turned to cynicism, those whose vulnerability has become bitterness.

Voice 2: Sometimes in the darkness, we remember those who are near to our hearts – colleagues, partners, parents, children, neighbors, friends. We thank God for their presence and we ask God to bless and protect them in all that they do – at home, school, as they travel, as they work, as they pray.

**All: You are with us, O God,
in darkness and in light.**

Voice 1: Sometimes in the solitude of darkness, our fears and concerns, our hopes and our visions rise to the surface. We come face to face with ourselves and with the road that lies ahead of us. And in that same darkness, we find companionship on the journey.

Voice 2: In that same darkness, we sometimes wonder whether the human race is going to make it at all.

All: We know you are with us, O God, yet we still await your coming. In the darkness that contains both our hopelessness and our expectancy, we watch for a sign of God's hope. Amen.

Ministry of Music

“O Holy Night” – Adams

Caleb McIver - Violin

Light in the Darkness

Christmas Carol: #154

“Silent Night”

with Caleb McIver

Benediction

Postlude