



BLUE CHRISTMAS In Hanover, MA

Sunday, December 22, 2025 || 5pm Blue Christmas service with piano || St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Hanover, MA || Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 121; Luke 2:8-20 || The Rev'd Amy Whitcomb Slemmer, Esq.

Welcome! Presumably, you or someone you know and love – who convinced you to be here – is not at all in the Christmas spirit. Thank you for being here and participating in the privilege of gathering together and stepping outside of the holiday joy, caroling and Christmas preparations in order to be together and attest to the fact that Christmas is hard for us. Perhaps this holiday is laced with bittersweet memories, deep longing or aching grief. Those are not the sentiments highlighted in our Christmas Carols, or even in our quiet Advent Hymns.

God knows the sadness that is woven in your being this Christmas. Christ in his full human nature, experienced the depth of grief at the death of his friend Lazarus. Jesus knows this sadness and sorrow that prevents us from fully engaging and joining in to the festive spirit that swirls around Hanover, through families and is represented by the beautiful decorations of this season.

We are not alone. Please look around and see your fellow travelers. Your faithful community members for whom this is not the joyful holiday season that is expected, but rather a holiday that rings hollow. We are here together, and we are able to make this journey lighter by walking shoulder to shoulder in the pain or morass that has colored this holiday blue for you.

Thank you for coming and creating a community of the broken hearted, or walking wounded. For being part of God's beloved community - the human and vulnerable, and perhaps sad part of the human experience that is not reflected back at us through any part of the Christmas miracle story.

Traditionally, we don't even hear a grumble from shepherds who stumbled in the dark, or whose feet hurt as they walked hundreds of miles faithfully following a star. In the story as

passed down to us, no one gives a second thought to having to pass by all the Inns, or heated lodgings, or places with catering, to come to a **barn** in the middle of Jerusalem.

The pilgrims get points, as far as I am concerned for pushing on and going inside – but I'll bet, again unlike our Christmas carols that assure us that the baby Jesus, though the cattle are lowing, the baby sleeps – not a sound he makes? I think not. I'd bet that the Christ child cried like any baby that is hungry, cold or disoriented having just been born and joined the human race.

These surprises or disappointments don't make great lyrics, but they must have been part of the holy truths of the birth of baby Jesus. Mary – her beatific, teen-age self must have been scared, if not really upset that she was going to have to deliver her very first baby in a barn where animals lived, ate and did their business. Did Joseph excuse himself and go outside, or step into an animal stall while she labored and delivered?– loudly, I'd imagine!

As you navigate the next few days, doing the best you can manage, consider the gritty truth about the birth of baby Jesus. Messy, no matter what. Disconnected - completely - from the blessing and promise that his arrival represented. We celebrate the fact of Jesus' humble circumstances at his birth – which was remarkable.

During this service, I invite you to take a step back – beyond the baby Jesus and his parents. Widen the circle and imagine how those neighbors, believers, townspeople, more distant relatives took to the news that this baby – who was born to change all of human history – to change the world – God's love made flesh – showed up in a barn, rested in the animals' feeding trough, in a little village that is now Palestine.

As you take good care of your heart, and your spirit, honoring your grief or sadness, please think of the circumstances of the birth of baby Jesus, and wonder whether in your grief, or heavy heartedness, you might have more in common with those first worshippers than is reflected in our joyful Christmas carols and in our sanitized and shiny story about Jesus' birth.

While not dwelling too long in the – oh, yes, me too – part of shared grief, I would move us directly into what God promises us in our sadness and in our grieving. Here are some promises from scripture, which I hope you can hear and inwardly digest. The first is from Psalm 34, which was among the prayers that Jesus grew up praying and singing:

Scriptural assurances for comforting the sad and brokenhearted:

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18), the very familiar from Matthew - "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matthew 5:4), St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians corroborates that "God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:3), and finally, our gospel

promises – similar in each, but here from the Gospel of John "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" (John 14:27)

The invitation in this Blue Christmas service is to offer God your broken heartedness. Step outside of the flow of carolers and revelers. Step aside and offer God your grief. God's promise is that you are blessed in your mourning, you are among God's beloved children, and if you share or narrate your sadness for god's listening heart, you will be comforted, and offered the peace that passes all understanding.

God bless you. Thank you for coming to this service and for honoring your grief, or sadness, or disappointment during this season of light. God bless you and may God's love pierce your sorrows and radiate and sustain you for the duration of the Christmas season.

Amen+