

So come now Child of Bethlehem to strengthen us in these days.
May we feel your presence in a way we have never known
not just as one born in a stable long ago and far away
but as one born in our hearts.

You have promised to go before us:
into our brokenness, into hospital rooms,
into empty houses, into graveyards,
into our future held by God,
and you are here, even now,
waiting for each of us:
to serve us,
to hold us,
to comfort us,
to heal us,
to live in us, now and for ever. **Amen.**

A reading from Isaiah 40

Litany of Remembrance

The first candle is lit

We light this first candle to remember those whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember clearly, their faces, their voices, their bodies. We embrace and give thanks for the memories that bind them to us in this season of expectation, when all creation waits for the light.
We remember them with love. May God's eternal love surround them.

The second candle is lit

We light this second candle to remember the pain of loss: loss of relationships, loss of trust, loss of jobs, loss of health, loss of faith, the loss of joy. We acknowledge and embrace the pain of the past, O God, and we offer it to you, asking that into our wounded hearts and open hands you will place the gift of peace, shalom.
**We remember that through you all things are possible.
Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into your future.**

The third candle is lit

We light this third candle to remember ourselves this Christmas time.

We pause and remember the past weeks, months, and for some of us years, that have been heavy with our burdens. We accept and lay before you, God, the sharpness of memory, the sadness and grief, the hurt and fear, the anger and pain. We accept and lay before you the ways we feel we have fallen short, and the times we have spent blaming ourselves, and you, for all that we have suffered. We accept and lay before you the time we have walked alone, in darkness; and in knowledge of our own mortality.

We remember that though we have journeyed far, and that, while lost, we may have turned away from the light, the light itself has not failed. We remember that though winter be upon us and though the night be dark, with the turning of the wheel the dawn will come, and dawn defeats the darkness.

The fourth candle is lit

We light this fourth candle to remember faith, the gift of light and hope that God offers to us in the stories of Hanukkah and of Christmas, which both also began in abandonment, insecurity, and humbleness, in a time of war and in a poor stable. We remember that the loving God who kept the light shining in the temple and who came to share this life with us promises us comfort and peace.

We remember the one who shares our burdens, who shows us the way to the light, and who journeys with us into all our tomorrows.

Choir to sing: In the Bleak Midwinter

During which you are invited to come one at a time and light a candle to take back to your seat.

A reading from Luke 2:1-7

We pray

Gentle God of love, help us reach out together for the light of faith, for renewal and recovery and a new day coming. Grant that hope may come to rest in our hearts, and let it go forth with us into the darkness, this night and in the nights to come, until we see the dawn.

Lighten our darkness, we beseech you, O God; give us light in the night season; and by your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night. Amen.

Almighty God, we thank you for your constant love and for the blessings of this day. We know that even when we cannot see or feel you, still you are there. Help us to remember you and to listen for your voice in the words of family, friends, and strangers.

Kindle our hearts and awaken hope, that we may know you as you reveal yourself in the world and in our lives.

Let the light of your Holy Spirit shine like these candles in the darkness, lighting the way for all who feel despairing, lost, or forgotten, and grant that it may come to dwell so deeply in our hearts that when we leave this place it may shine on, for us and for those we meet along the way. **Amen.**

Choir to sing: Silent night

We pray

Another day will come, O God. I know not what it may bring forth, but make me ready, God, for whatever it may be. If I am to stand up, help me to stand bravely. If I am to sit still, help me to sit quietly. If I am to lie low, help me to do it patiently. And if I am to do nothing, help me do it gallantly. Make these words more than words, and give me the spirit of thy peace. Amen.

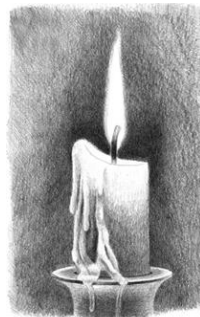
O God, support us all the day long in this troubled life, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then Lord, in thy mercy, grant us safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last. **Amen.**

Blessing and Dismissal

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace, both now and forever more. **Amen.**

The peace of the Lord be always with you.
And also with you.

*The service used tonight is based on an order developed and used at
The Cathedral Church of Saint Andrew, Honolulu Hawaii.
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Anna Benefice A Quiet Christmas Service

*Though I sit in darkness,
the LORD will be my light.
(Micah 7:8)*

Tonight we gather here in this place of refuge,
some of us feel lost
some of us feel lonely
some of us are afraid
some of us feel sad.

Tonight we gather, daring to wonder
if God has indeed come in Jesus –
discerning the rejection we have known
intimate with our failed relationships
holding our heartache in hands of tenderness.

Tonight we gather with neighbours and strangers
a family made one by our brokenness;
**coming with our hearts full of hope
and our heads filled with doubts.**

Tonight, we gather just as we are
**for God has promised to meet us here
and to welcome us for who we are.**

Choir to sing: O little town of Bethlehem verses 1-3

Holy God of Advent you became weak
so we would find strength in moments of heartbreak;
you left the safety of heaven to wander the wilderness of the world
holding our hands when we feel hopeless;
you set aside your glory to hold our pain so we might be healed
even when there seems to be no hope;
you became one of us
so we would never be alone in any moment, in any circumstance.