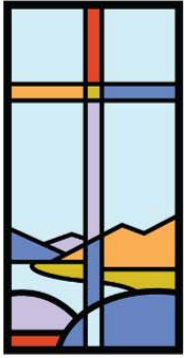


SAINT STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH



A Service For

BLUE CHRISTMAS



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2025
5:00 PM

*Upon entering the church we ask that you extend a respectful courtesy
to others by speaking quietly and silencing all cell phones.*

Please stand as you are able.

Entrance Hymn #79

“O little town of Bethlehem”

St. Louis

1. O lit - tle town of Beth - le - hem, how still we see thee lie!
2. For Christ is born of Ma - ry; and gath - ered all a - bove,
3. How si - lent - ly, how si - lent - ly, the won - drous gift is given!
4. Where chil - dren pure and hap - py pray to the bless - ed Child,
5. O ho - ly Child of Beth - le - hem, de - scend to us, we pray;

A - bove thy deep and dream - less sleep the si - lent stars go by;
while mor - tals sleep, the an - gels keep their watch of won - dering love.
So God im - parts to hu - man hearts the bless - ings of God's heaven.
where mis - er - y cries out to thee, Son of the mo - ther mild;
cast out our sin and en - ter in, be born in us to - day.

yet in thy dark streets shin - eth the ev - er - last - ing Light;
O morn - ing stars, to - geth - er pro - claim the ho - ly birth!
No ear may hear his com - ing, but in this world of sin,
where char - i - ty stands watch - ing and faith hoilds wide the door,
We hear the Christ - mas an - gels the great glad tid - ings tell;

the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee to - night.
and prais - es sing to God the King, and peace to all on earth.
where meek soul will re - ceive him, still the dear Christ en - ters in.
the dark night wakes, the glo - ry breaks, and Christ - mas comes once more.
O come to us, a - bide with us, our Lord Em - man - u - el!

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Priest: Dear friends in Christ, we are deep in this season of Advent in which the Church bids us prepare to celebrate for the coming of Christ; a coming that we recall in the Child of Bethlehem; a coming that we experience in the gift of the Spirit, in the bread of the Eucharist, in the joy of human lives that are shared; a coming we wait for when God gathers up all things in Christ. Let us in this holy season reflect on the coming of Christ who brings light to the world. Let us leave behind heaviness, walk in the light that shines on our path, and renew within ourselves the hope of glory to which God beckons us. And as we turn towards the light, let us have on our hearts all those who see no light, for whom all is sadness and despair. Let us pray that they too may be illumined by God's presence.

The people observe a moment of silence.

Priest: Blessed are you, Holy God, just and true, to you be praise and glory for ever! Of old you spoke by the mouth of your prophets but in our days you speak through your Son whom you have appointed the heir of all things. Grant us, your people, to walk in his light that we may be found ready and watching when he comes again in glory; for you are our light and our salvation.

All: **Blessed be God for ever.**

Priest: God our Creator, you spoke to the prophets of old of a Savior who would bring peace. You helped them to spread the joyful message of his coming kingdom. Help us, as we prepare to celebrate his birth, to share with those around us the good news of your power and love. We ask this through Jesus Christ, the Light who is coming into the world. All Lord Jesus, Light of the world, the prophets said you would bring peace and save your people in trouble. Give peace in our hearts at Christmas and show all the world God's love.

Hymn of Praise

Child of Love
The Stones

Matthew West, Steve Hindalong, Mark D. Lee

*Child of wonder close Your eyes
Rest here in my arms tonight
Someday You will save the world
But tonight I'll hold You
Right here in my arms*

*Gabriel's promise has come true
God has blessed this world with You
And as I humbly hold You now
In my heart I know
I'm holding Heaven's Child*

*Chorus
Precious Miracle of life
Child of love
Gift of hope the Gift of light
From the Father above
And You were made for all mankind
But You will always be mine
Child of love*

*Child of wonder
Close Your eyes*

Priest: God be with you.
People: **And also with you.**
Priest: Let us pray.

The Collect of the Day

O God our Creator, to restore our fallen race you spoke the effectual word, and the Eternal Word became flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary: Mercifully grant that as he humbled himself to be clothed with our humanity, so we may be found worthy, in him, to be clothed with his divinity; who lives and reigns for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Please be seated.

THE LESSONS

The First Reading Isaiah 40:1-11

Reader: Sally Drake

A Reading from the Book of Isaiah.

"Comfort, O comfort my people," says your God. "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins." A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken." A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. Get you up to a

high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

Reader: Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people.

People: **Thanks be to God.**

Psalm 121

- 1 I lift up my eyes to the hills; *
from where is my help to come?
- 2 My help comes from the Lord, *
the maker of heaven and earth.
- 3 He will not let your foot be moved *
and he who watches over you will not fall asleep.
- 4 Behold, he who keeps watch over Israel *
shall neither slumber nor sleep;
- 5 The Lord himself watches over you; *
the Lord is your shade at your right hand,
- 6 So that the sun shall not strike you by day, *
nor the moon by night.
- 7 The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; *
it is he who shall keep you safe.
- 8 The Lord shall watch over your going out and
your coming in, *
from this time forth for evermore.

The Second Reading Romans 5:1-5

A Reading from the Letter of Paul to the Romans.

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Reader: Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people.

People: **Thanks be to God.**

Please stand as you are able.

The Gospel Reading Luke 1:39-56

Priest: The Holy Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ according to Luke.

People: **Glory to you, O Christ.**

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.' And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.' And Mary remained with her for about three months and then returned to her home.

Priest: The Gospel of the Savior.

People: **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Please be seated.

The Sermon

The Very Rev. Christopher Montella
Rector

A period of silent reflection follows the sermon.

Candle Lighting

Believe
Rachel Rieckhoff, soloist

Cam

*If the flowers can find their way up through
the fallen snow
And if the icy Christmas wind can find the
strength to blow
If the stars deep in the dark can
find the light to glow
Then even on my darkest day, I too can find
the hope*

Chorus
*So I will open up my heart like a kid on
Christmas Eve
When the dreams are as real as the lights up
on the tree
And what you choose to look for is what you're
gonna see
So if only for tonight, I will believe
I will believe*

*When you wish upon a star, it won't always
come true
When your heart is broken, it's a chance to
start anew
There's nothing I would rather do than spend
this night with you
You don't have to say it 'cause I know you feel
it too*

Chorus
*So I will hold on (hold on) to this feeling
(feeling)
'Cause I've lost it before
And now I know that growing up
You need it even more*

Chorus

Members of the congregation are invited to come forward as directed by the ushers to light a candle representing their prayers during this time.

Please stand as you are able.

Litany of Healing

Let us name before God those for whom we offer our prayers.

The People audibly name those for whom they are interceding.

Intercessor: God our Creator, your will for all people is health and salvation;

People: **We praise you and thank you, O God.**

Intercessor: God the Son, you came that we might have life, and might have it more abundantly;

People: **We praise you and thank you, O God.**

Intercessor: God the Holy Spirit, you make our bodies the temple of your presence;

People: **We praise you and thank you, O God.**

Intercessor: Holy Trinity, one God, in you we live and move and have our being;

People: **We praise you and thank you, O God.**

Intercessor: Lord, grant your healing grace to all who are sick, injured, or disabled, that they may be made whole;

People: **Hear us, O Giver of life.**

Intercessor: Grant to all who seek your guidance, and to all who are lonely, anxious, or despondent, a knowledge of your will and an awareness of your presence;

People: **Hear us, O Giver of life.**

Intercessor: Mend broken relationships, and restore those in emotional distress to soundness of mind and serenity of spirit;

People: **Hear us, O Giver of life.**

Intercessor: Bless physicians, nurses, and all others who minister to the suffering, granting them wisdom and skill, sympathy and patience;

People: **Hear us, O Giver of life.**

Intercessor: Grant to the dying peace and a holy death, and uphold by the grace and consolation of your Holy Spirit those who are bereaved;

People: **Hear us, O Giver of life.**

Intercessor: Restore to wholeness whatever is broken by human sin, in our lives, in our nation, and in the world;

People: **Hear us, O Giver of life.**

Intercessor: You are our All Holy God who does wonders:

People: **You have declared your power among the peoples.**

Intercessor: With you, O God, is the well of life:

People: **And in your light we see light.**

Intercessor: Hear us, O Giver of life:

People: **Heal us, and make us whole.**

Priest:

O Emmanuel, God-with-us, You show us the face of divinity, and reveal the fullness of our humanity. Come: renew your creation, restore us all in Christ, and enable us to become who we are, your faithful and loving people. We pray in the name of Jesus. **Amen.**

Please stand or kneel as you are able.

Confession of Need

Priest: Let us confess our need for God's healing grace.

Silence

Priest and People:

**Compassionate God, we confess our weaknesses
and our need for your strengthening touch.**

**We confess that some illnesses stem from our own fault,
while others are beyond our control.**

**We turn to you, source of life,
and ask in the name of our Savior Jesus Christ
for the gifts of true healing and life in you. Amen.**

Priest:

May the God of love visit you in your times of trial and weakness, and raise you to newness of life, through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Priest:

Those who wish to receive the laying on of hands and anointing may come forward at this time.

At the altar rail the priest will offer to lay hands on each person's head and, having dipped a thumb in the oil of unction that was previously blessed by our bishop, make the sign of the cross on their forehead, and say a prayer for the healing of mind, body and soul. People are invited to make special prayer requests if they so desire. If you do not desire healing prayer, you may use this time for prayer and reflection.

Breath of Heaven

Terry Dexter, Guest Soloist

Please stand as you are able.

The Peace

Priest: The peace of Christ be always with you.

People: **And also with you.**

Members of the congregation who are joining us via livestream are encouraged to post "Peace be with you" in the comments or to use the "like" or "love" reaction button to take part in the virtual exchange of God's peace with the rest of the congregation at this time.

THE LITURGY OF THE TABLE

Please stand as you are able.

Offertory Hymn #115

"What child is this"

Greensleeves

1. What child is this, who, laid to rest, on Ma-ry's lap is sleep - ing?
2. Why lies he in such mean es - tate where ox and ass are feed - ing?
3. So bring him in - cense, gold, and myrrh, come, peas - ant, king, to own him;
Whom an - gels greet with an - thems sweet, while shep - herds watch are keep - ing?
Good Chris - tian, fear: for sin - ners here the si - lent Word is plead - ing.
the King of kings sal - va - tion brings, let lov - ing hearts en - throne him.
Refrain
This, this is Christ the King, whom shep - herds guard and an - gels sing;
haste, haste to bring him laud, the babe, the son of Ma - ry.

All: Praise God from whom all blessings flow.
Praise God from all creatures, here below.
Praise God, you hosts in heav'n above.
Praise God the Trinity of Love. Amen.

Priest: God be with you.
People: And also with you.
Priest: Lift up your hearts.
People: We lift them to God.
Priest: Let us give thanks.
People: It is right to give God thanks and praise.

Worship and praise belong to you, God our maker. Out of nothing, you called all worlds into being and still you draw the universe to its fulfilment. Dawn and evening celebrate your glory till time shall be no more.

In Christ your Son the life of heaven and earth were joined, sealing the promise of a new creation, given, yet still to come.

Taught by your Spirit, we who bear your threefold likeness look for the City of Peace in whose light we are transfigured and the earth transformed.

As children of your redeeming purpose who await the coming of your Son, we offer you our praise, with angels and archangels and the whole company of heaven singing the hymn of your unending glory:

Priest and people say together:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

Standing or kneeling as you are able.

Glory and thanksgiving be to you, most loving God. In Jesus you showed us yourself. Our hope is built on him, the first, the last, the living one. Obedient, even to accepting death, He opened the gate of glory and calls us now to share the life of heaven.

Before he was given up to suffering and death, alight with the vision of a feast that heralded a kingdom yet to come, at supper with his disciples he took bread and offered you thanks. He broke the bread, and gave it to them, saying: "Take, eat. This is my Body: it is broken for you."

After supper, he took the cup, he offered you thanks, and gave it to them saying: "Drink this, all of you. This is my Blood of the new covenant; it is poured out for you, and for all, that sins may be forgiven. Do this in remembrance of me."

We now obey your Son's command.

Priest and People

We recall his blessed passion and death, his glorious resurrection and ascension; and we look for the coming of his Kingdom.

Made one with him, we offer you these gifts with them ourselves, a single, holy, living sacrifice.

Hear us, most merciful God, and send your Holy Spirit upon us and upon this bread and this wine, that, overshadowed by your Spirit's life-giving power, they may be the Body and Blood of your Son, and we may be kindled with the fire of your love and renewed for the service of your Kingdom.

Help us, who are baptized into the fellowship of Christ's Body to live and work to your praise and glory; may we grow together in unity and love until at last, in your new creation, we enter into our heritage in the company of the Virgin Mary, Stephen and all your saints, apostles, and prophets, and all of our siblings living and departed.

Through Jesus Christ our Savior, with whom, and in whom, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honor and glory be to you, O God of all ages, world without end. **Amen.**

Let us pray for the coming of the kingdom as Jesus taught us.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Breaking of the Bread

A period of silence is kept.

Priest: Alleluia. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us;

People: **Therefore let us keep the feast. Alleluia.**

The Gifts of God for the People of God.
Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you,
and feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving.

*All are welcome to receive communion. The table we set is the Lord's.
Wherever you find yourself on your spiritual journey you are welcome to
receive the Bread and Wine made holy.*

*The church teaches that temporal isolation cannot constrain the sacrament's ineffable power.
Calling us to "massive, corporate, spiritual communion,"*

The Invitation to Holy Communion

A spiritual communion is a personal devotional that anyone can pray at any time to express their desire to receive Holy Communion at that moment, but in which circumstances impede them from actually receiving Holy Communion.

Priest and People say together:

My Jesus, I believe that you are truly present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. I love you above all things, and long for you in my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. As though you have already come, I embrace you and unite myself entirely to you; never permit me to be separated from you. Amen.

Please be seated.

Please follow usher instructions for taking communion.

Communion Music

Tenderly Calling
The Stones

Jan Garrett

*Chorus
Home, come on home
Ye who are weary come home
Softly and tenderly calling
Home, come on home*

*Just when it feels like there's no one
To mend all my broken down dreams
I hear a voice deep inside me
Tenderly calling to me
Chorus*

*Sometimes when I'm feeling lonesome
And no one on earth seems to care
I'm all by myself in the darkness
With no one and nothing to share*

*So don't be afraid of the darkness
And don't run away from the storm
Stand up and face your reflection
The feelings you try to ignore*

*Just when it feels like it's hopeless
And I'll never make it alone
I hear the voices of angels
Tenderly calling me home Chorus*

*After the tempest is over
You've let yourself come on through
You'll hear a voice in the silence
Tenderly calling to you
Chorus*

Joy is in Our Hearts
The Stones

Sara Groves

*We were pressed on every side
full of fear and troubled thoughts
for good reason we carried heavy hearts*

*Christ our joy and strength
hallelujah hallelujah
Christ our joy and strength*

*it is good to come together
in our friendship to remember
all the reasons hope is in our hearts*

*oh we saw the face of Angels
many good things well secured
for good reason this joy is in our hearts*

*hallelujah hallelujah
Christ our joy and strength
hallelujah hallelujah
Christ our joy and strength*

*hallelujah hallelujah
Christ our joy and strength
hallelujah hallelujah
Christ our joy and strength*

*now with patience in our suffering
perseverance in our prayers
with good reason this hope is in our hearts*

*hallelujah hallelujah
Christ our joy and strength
hallelujah hallelujah
Christ our joy and strength
for good reason joy is in our hearts*

hallelujah hallelujah

Please stand as you are able.

Post Communion Prayer

Let us pray.

**God of new beginnings,
you draw near to us in word and sacrament
to strengthen and renew us;
kindle in us the fire of your Spirit,
may your light so shine through us
that all may welcome your Son at his coming.
We ask this in the name of Jesus
Emmanuel. Amen.**

Blessing

Know that the ever-present mystery we name God
is in your past forgiving you,
in your present loving you,
and in your future meeting you.
And may the blessing of the Source of life, love and hope,
the Word of life, compassion and wisdom
and Breath of life, grace and truth
surround, sustain and surprise you,
this day and all your days. **Amen**

Recessional Hymn #111

"Silent night"

Stille Nacht

1. Si - lent night, ho - ly night, all is calm, all is bright
 2. Si - lent night, ho - ly night, shep - herds quake at the sight,
 3. Si - lent night, ho - ly night, Son of God, love's pure light

round yon vir - gin mo - ther and child. Ho - ly in - fant so ten - der and mild,
 glo - ries stream from hea - ven a - far, heaven - ly hosts sing al - le - lu - ia;
 ra - diant beams from thy ho - ly face, with the dawn of re - deem - ing grace,

sleep in hea - ven - ly peace. Sleep in hea - ven - ly peace.
 Christ, the Sa - vior, is born! Christ, the Sa - vior, is born!
 Je - sus, Lord, at thy birth. Je - sus, Lord, at thy birth.

The Dismissal

Priest: As we await our coming Saviour, go in peace to love and serve God.

People: In the name of Christ. Amen.

Service credits:

Spiritual Communion: St. Alphonsus de Liguori, 1696-1787

Eucharistic Prayer, Scottish Liturgy 1982 (revised 2022), Eucharistic Prayer II.

From *The Hymnal 1982* #79 "O little town of Bethlehem", Words: Phillips Brooks (1835-1893), Music: St. Louis, Lewis H Redner (1831-1908). #111 "Silent night, holy night", Words: Joseph Mohr (1792-1848); tr. John Freeman Young (1820-1885); Music: *Stille Nacht*, melody Franz Xaver Gruber (1787-1863); harm. Carl H. Reinecke (1824-1910). #115 "What child is this", Words: William Chatterton Dix (1837-1898). Music: *Greensleeves*, English melody; harm. *Christmas Carols New and Old*, 1871.

Tenderly Calling words & Music: Jan Garrett ©1984, Foolchild Music, ASCAP. Used with Permission.

Believe — Words & Music: Camaron Ochs & Anders Mouridson

Joy is in Our Hearts — Words & Music: Sara Groves