

# **When Your Heart Breaks at Christmas**

A Service of Lamentation & Remembrance

## **ANNOTATED ORDER**

### **Prelude**

The prelude music will include a variety of soft, instrumental carols of the season. The selections include more meditative carols and ones that express God's presence but also acknowledge the darkness and sorrow of life. Examples include, *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear* (which will be referenced in the service), *Of the Father's Love Begotten*, *I Wonder as I Wander*, *O Little Town of Bethlehem*, *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*, *What Child Is This?* and *O Holy Night*.

### **Call to Worship**

The Call to Worship (included below) is really an invitation for those gathered to enter into a time of reflection. It begins with a text from Isaiah 9:2. While it acknowledges the sorrow that we bring, it affirms that bringing it to God is an act of worship. It also expresses hope and a commitment to praise God even through our sorrow. The closing text (in quotes) is from a song by Michael Card called, *Come Lift Up Your Sorrows*.

*“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;  
On those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”  
In this season of Advent, we remember that Jesus entered a world  
that was cold and dark; a world where sorrow and suffering are very real,  
the kind of world where we still live.*

*We are invited to bring the deepest sorrows of our hearts into the very presence of God.*

*So come, come bring your sorrow to the God who is with us.  
“Come lift up your sorrow, and offer your pain.  
Come make a sacrifice of all your shame,  
There in your wilderness, He's waiting for you  
to worship Him with your wounds, for He's wounded too.”*

## **Invocation**

The invocation is a prayer recognizing God's presence among us, even in our brokenness. It continues the theme of the Call to Worship.

*Eternal God, we acknowledge your presence among us.  
We recognize that You are Emmanuel, God With Us.  
We thank you for being here, in this place, with Your people.  
We come into Your presence with so many varied emotions and experiences.  
We offer up to You our joys and our sorrows as an act of faith and worship.  
May You bring hope to our heaviness and light to our darkness.  
May You come and bring each of us a reminder of Your presence,  
Your Power and Your Peace.  
This we pray in the Name of Emmanuel.  
AMEN.*

## **Introduction of the Service**

The tone of the service has been set with the Prelude, Call to Worship and Invocation, but here there will be a further invocation of the nature and purpose of the gathering. It will focus on giving people permission to express their emotions throughout the service and to allow all the various aspects of the service to minister to them.

## **The Old Testament Reading – *Isaiah 9:1-7***

The Old Testament text will be read which is a selection from Isaiah, already referred to in the Call to Worship. It is a messianic prophecy, but also acknowledges the darkness and suffering in the world that is the very reason why a Savior is needed.

## **Carol: *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel***

The opening song will be the carol, *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*, which is a haunting melody in a minor key. It expresses the need and longing for a Messiah to come to deliver those in captivity, those who mourn. It asks for God to cheer our spirits, disperse

the gloom and put to flight the shadows of death. It prays for the end of strife. We will sing all of the stanzas, but without the refrain of rejoicing. This will be saved and sung at the end of the service to point the people to the hope of the coming of Christ.

### **A Reading from the Psalms – *Psalm 77:1-9***

This selection is a Psalm of Lament. It is a cry to God from a place of sorrow and suffering. It is a Psalm of brutal honesty in which the writer wonders if God has forgotten him. It gives voice to what many people in the service may be feeling, but may not be able to express. It ends with a question, “Has God slammed the door on his compassion?” The song that follows, and indeed the rest of the service, seeks to answer that question.

### **Special Music: *When Your Heart Breaks at Christmas***

The service continues with a song to be sung by a soloist, *When Your Heart Breaks at Christmas* (The lyrics are included at the end of this appendix.) The story behind the song will be shared prior to its being sung. People will be encouraged to meditate on God’s presence in their own situation or suffering while they listen to the song.

### **Video Presentation**

Next there will be a video presentation of pictures of family members who have died in the past year (or further back if people choose). An invitation to include these images will take place, in advance, giving people a chance to submit them ahead of time. Additionally, appropriate images of various tragedies that took place over the past year will also be included. These images will be part of a visual presentation accompanied by the song, *Prayer for the Children*.

## **The Gospel Reading – *Matthew 2:13-18***

The text that will be the basis for the homily will be read. This text is part of Matthew's birth narrative and chronicles the slaughter of the infants at the hand of King Herod. It includes the quotation from Jeremiah 31:15, "A cry was heard in Ramah - weeping and great mourning. Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be comforted, for they are no more."

### **Homily – *A Violence Endured***

The homily, based on the text from Matthew 2 will focus on the reality that suffering and sorrow were equally present in the Christmas narrative as much as the glory and the joy. In fact, it demonstrates the very reason why Christ came. The point made is that the message of Advent is precisely the message that we need when our heart is breaking. Rather than pull back, we should run to the message of Christmas and experience the presence of a God who understands our sorrow, who weeps with us, and who offers us hope and strength. A rough outline of the homily's key points is included at the end of the paper. At the close of the homily there will be a reference to the carol, *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*, a carol with a message that fits the theme of the service well. There will be a particular focus upon the third stanza:

*And ye, beneath life's crushing load,  
Whose forms are bending low,  
Who toil along the climbing way  
With painful steps and slow,*

*Look up! For glad and golden hours  
come swiftly on the wing.  
O rest beside the weary road,  
And hear the angels sing!*

### **Carol – *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear***

Having talked about the carol and its message for those gathered, it will be sung by the congregation. This is the invitation that those who are experiencing “the crushing load” will “look up” and will find “rest beside the weary road and hear the angels sing.”

### **Candle Lighting Ceremony**

As the carol, *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*, continues to be played instrumentally, people will be invited to come forward and light candles representing someone they have lost or some struggle they are facing. Additionally the option will be given for them to speak the name of the individual or the struggle they are facing and name it before the congregation. Some may simply choose to light a candle and return to their seat.

### **Carol: *Emmanuel* and Refrain of *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel***

Following the Candle Lighting Ceremony there will be a closing song, the Christmas chorus, *Emmanuel* (Emmanuel, Emmanuel, His Name is called, Emmanuel. God with us, revealed in us, His Name is called Emmanuel.”). This will serve as an affirmation of God’s presence among us, in the middle of our suffering or sorrow. This will flow right into the refrain, skipped at the opening of the service, of *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*: “Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel has come to thee, O Israel.” With this selection the service ends with the promise and the assurance of a word of hope.

## Benediction

The Benediction will begin with a poem written by my father and then move into a closing prayer of blessing that will flow out of the theme of the service but also speak to the hope of Christmas.

Come, Lord Christ as once you came,  
Leaving glory, wealth and fame.  
Come. Amid your people dwell,  
Be for us EMMANUEL.

Come, Lord Jesus from above,  
Be again God's gift of Love.  
Make this earth your citadel.  
Be for us EMMANUEL.

Come, Lord to our needy race  
Once again reveal your face.  
Heal our spirits, make us well.  
Be for us EMMANUEL.

John M. Nielson

May you go, conscious of the Love of God the Father  
Who sent to you the Son, the Prince of Peace.  
May you go empowered by the Holy Spirit  
To live with faith in spite of the turmoil of life.  
May the Advent of our God give you strength.

The Lord bless you and keep you;  
the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you;  
the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace.  
In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
AMEN.

## **Postlude**

The postlude music will also be instrumental Christmas carols, but will add into the mix some more upbeat selections. In addition to *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*, *O Holy Night*, *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* that have already been heard in the service, carols such as *Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus*, *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* and *The First Noel* will also be heard.

## **When Your Heart Breaks at Christmas**

When your heart breaks at Christmas, He will be Emmanuel.

In the darkness of the Silent Night, a message He will tell,

That God drew near at Christmas, and so He's near to you.

So when your heart breaks at Christmas, I'll tell you what to do.

Remember, Jesus is Emmanuel, He'll bring you Hope and Peace within.

He is a Light to fill the darkness, no matter where you've been.

In sorrow, He will be your Joy and He'll dry your ev'ry tear.

No matter what you're facing, remember, He is near.

When your heart breaks at Christmas, He will be a Shining Star.

And when you need His Comfort, He'll never be too far.

For God drew near at Christmas, and so He's near to you.

So when your heart breaks at Christmas, I'll tell you what to do.

Remember, Jesus is Emmanuel, He'll bring you Hope and Peace within.

He is a Light to fill the darkness, no matter where you've been.

In sorrow, He will be your Joy and He'll dry your ev'ry tear.

No matter what you're facing, remember, He is near.



Remember, Jesus is Emmanuel, He'll bring me Hope and Peace within.

He is a Light to fill my darkness, no matter where I've been.

In sorrow, He will be my Joy and He'll dry my ev'ry tear.

No matter what I'm facing, I'll remember He is near.

Remember Jesus is Emmanuel, remember He is near.

Yes Jesus is Emmanuel, remember He is near.

When your heart breaks at Christmas, remember, He is near.

## ***A Violence Endured***

### ***The Forgotten Cast of Christmas***

1. John the Baptist - A Voice of Hope
2. Zechariah - A Vision of Love.
3. Elizabeth - A Visit of Joy.
4. King Herod - A Violence Endured and the Promise of Peace.

### ***A Blue Christmas***

1. Christmas is a season of hope, love, joy and peace.
2. Christmas may also be a time of sorrow.
3. Christmas does not change the realities of life.
4. Christmas does change the resources we have to face life.

### ***Introducing Herod “The Great”***

1. Herod was disturbed.
2. Herod was deceptive.
3. Herod was depraved.
4. Herod was destructive.

### ***A Cry in Ramah***

1. Jesus was born into a sinful and fallen world.
2. Jesus was born because of that sinful and fallen world.
3. Jesus was born into a world of sorrow and weeping.
4. Jesus was born to bring peace and comfort to a world of sorrow and weeping.

### ***When Your Heart Breaks at Christmas***

1. Be honest about your tears.
2. Be looking for the signs of God's presence.
3. Be willing to run toward Christmas not away from it.
4. Be ready to receive Christ's comfort and peace.
5. Be committed to community.