

A Dark Advent/Christmas Service, St. Matthew's Episcopal Church,  
Fairbanks, Alaska

In this season of the year, the season of business and frantic activity, when we put up lights to keep us from living in the darkness, it may be very hard to want to participate the way our society and our family and friends want us to. This may be a time of deep darkness and sadness for you.

Let the darkness of the church and the lights of the candles be a holy place for all that is in your heart. Please take a strip of cloth and a marker and write on that strip of cloth any one or two things that you want to lift up to God.

### Order of Service

Hymn 66 "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus"  
Opening, BCP p355  
Collect  
Reading: Ecclesiastes 3: 1-11  
Psalm 23, BCP p476  
Reading: John 20:24-29  
Homily

#### **Candle Light Litany of Remembrance**

(During the time of prayer and reflection, the congregation is invited to name on the strip of cloth their loss, their grief, their depression.)

ONE: We light this Advent candle to remember those persons who have been loved and have departed. We pause to remember their name, their face, their voice. We give thanks for the memory that binds them to us this season which anticipates Christmas.

ALL: **May God's eternal love surround them.**

ONE: We light this second candle to redeem the pain of loss: the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, the loss of health. As we gather up the pain of the past, we offer it to You, O God, asking that into our open hands, You will place the gift of peace.

ALL: **Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into your future**

ONE: We light this third candle to remember ourselves this Christmas time. We pause and remember the grief, the sadness, the hurts, the pain of reflecting on our own mortality.

ALL: **Let us remember that dawn defeats darkness.**

ONE: This fourth candle is lit to remember our faith and the gift of hope which God offers to us in the Christmas story. We remember that God who shares our life, promises us a place and time of no more pain and suffering.

ALL: **Let us remember the one who shows the way and who goes with us into our tomorrows.**

Invitation to Pray: In the spirit of the season, let us now ask our God for what we need for ourselves as we participate in the Christmas Season as people coping with our loss, pain, suffering, loneliness, grief, sadness. In response to the words, "Loving God, hear our prayer", you are invited to respond with "**And in your merciful love, answer.**"

God, we come to you in this Christmas Season, with the pain growing inside us. As the nights have been growing longer, so has the darkness wrapped itself around our hearts. In this season of our longest nights, we offer to you the pain in our hearts, the traumas that some of us cannot put into words. Loving God, hear our prayer.

ALL: **And in your merciful love, answer.**

Compassionate God, there are those among us who are grieving over what might have been. A death or loss changed our experience of Christmas. Once it was a special day for us too, but someone has died or moved away. We find ourselves adrift, alone, lost. Loving God, hear our prayer.

ALL: **And in your merciful love, answer.**

The Christmas Season reminds us of all that used to be and cannot be anymore. The memories of what was, the fears of what may be, stifle us. All around us we hear the sounds of celebration. But all we experience is a sense of feeling depressed. Please be near us this night. Loving God, hear our prayer.

ALL: And in your merciful love, answer.

#### THE GREAT THANKSGIVING      BCP Page 367

During the Eucharist, those inclined are invited to bring their strips of cloth up, as they receive Communion, and place them in the manger and take a lighted candle from the table, which you may take home.

#### POST COMMUNION PRAYER      BCP Page 365

Reading: John 1:1-11

Silent departure from the church in the Peace of God



The strips of cloth will remain in the manger throughout Christmas, swaddling the Child, and then be immolated on 12<sup>th</sup> Night.