

Blue Christmas Service
Cloth for the Cradle
Leaders Guide



What you will need

- Advent Wreath
- Cradle / manger
- Strips of cloth (width and length dependent on size of cradle/manger – long enough for them to overhang the sides / wide enough to write on and not take too many to cover the manger)
- Christ child from crib

Opening Responses

- Reader We light our first candle
a single light that the deepest darkness cannot conquer –
small – insignificant
but a sign of hope.
- Reader 2
or **All** Let it speak to us of the tiny flame of hope buried within us –
the stubborn little light that refuses to be extinguished
by all that life has thrown at it.
- Reader We light our second candle
a companion to the first –
equally small – equally insignificant –
but witnessing to hope that another light brings.
- Reader 2
or **All** Let it speak to us of the lights of companionship –
of our families and our friends –
of strangers
and kindnesses found in unexpected places
that restored our hope in human nature.
- Reader We light our third candle
recalling nights of watching and waiting –
sleepless – anxious
when dawn seemed to ebb further from the horizon
and hope seemed forlorn.
- Reader 2
or **All** Let it speak to us of the sureness of morning –
of the passing of darkness
of suffering –
and the promise of an eternal sunrise
dawning for those we have loved and lost
and dawning too for us –
though we may yet be in that darkest hour before the dawn.

Reader We light our fourth candle –
 marking the closing of the Advent season
 and the immediacy of Christmas –
 a time of peace and joy
 we may not ourselves feel able to welcome –
 as our spirits dwell in dark and wintriness.

Reader 2 Let it speak to us of hope –
or **All** of being together in this place of healing and wholeness –
 of our companionship this night
 at the turning of the year –
 of faith that we and those we have loved and lost
 are held eternally in the hand
 of the One who brought light into being –
 and who knows each one of us by name.

Scripture Readings

Some of the traditional readings for Christmas can be used – reminding people that they speak of darkness and fear but also of God’s abiding care.

Isaiah 9: 1-6

Luke 2: 1-7

John 1: 1-5

Hymn – something that everyone will know – e.g. Silent Night, O Little Town of Bethlehem, In the Bleak Midwinter

Short reflection / homily (ideas)

Reflect on how much of what is around us at this time promises Christmas fun and jollity but how the story behind it is much starker – more complicated.

There is the Joy of birth of Christ – but it involved an “unwanted” pregnancy – a young unmarried woman conceiving a child... a man betrothed and risking shame and humiliation in marrying her... life in an occupied country... the call to travel to Bethlehem while she is heavily pregnant... the trouble finding somewhere to stay... a birth in a stable...

We also know that this Child would live a life that would confront many vested interests... that the young mother holding her baby will one day hold the dead body of her son... fulfilling a prophecy that a sword would pierce her heart.

The Child who will be placed symbolically in our cradle later was laid in a manger – but 33 years later will be laid in a tomb.

The Christmas Story gives us the story of a birth that brings joy but which prefigures suffering and death. It is a story in which we can place our own – the joys and the sorrows – the ecstasies and the agonies – and find a God who understands them all because he came among us and lived as we live – but his dying led to a resurrection which is the promise for us all.

Cloth for the cradle – remembering

People are invited to write the name of the person or the situation causing them pain on a strip of cloth and to hold it for a moment. There is no limit to the number of people they can remember in this way – using several cloths if necessary.

Once ready – gentle Christmas music plays as people are invited to put their cloths in the cradle.

Once all in place, the “baby” is quietly placed in the manger and the Christ light is lit. (Maybe with words about the Child who came into the world of darkness to bring light – death > new life, etc...)

Intercessions (ideas)

Lord Jesus, your birth brought joy to the world:

may we find hope that one day we too will know joy again.

Lord, in your mercy – hear our prayer.

We pray for those we have loved and lost – or the situation that is giving us pain.

I invite you to simply name them to yourself or put it into simple words. (*Allow a short pause for people to name this for themselves*)

We pray for the grace to place them into your hands so that our souls can be a little freer for our families and friends over the next few days.

Lord, in your mercy – hear our prayer.

We pray for our family and friends – for all who love us but who often don't know what to say – or say or do the wrong thing. (*Pause*)

May we find the strength to be gentle with them and to enjoy their company as we try to celebrate this Christmas.

Lord, in your mercy – hear our prayer.

We pray for those who feel as we do but who do not have family – friends – or anyone to share the load. (*Pause*)

May they find someone who cares and reaches into their loneliness with love.

Lord, in your mercy – hear our prayer.

We pray for those who will meet grief and pain over the Christmas period. (*Pause*)

May those around them surround them with love and compassion.

Lord, in your mercy – hear our prayer.

We place our prayer in the hands of God and the intercession of Mary whose dying son committed the human family to her care:

Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou amongst women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners,
now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Closing Responses

Reader Into the darkness of our gathering
 we brought light –

All To speak to us of a light stronger than darkness.

Reader Our treasured memories woven to create cloth for a cradle –

**All A cloth enfolding the Child
 who in turn enfolds our loved ones –
 who enfolds us.**

Reader We gathered as friends – as families – as strangers

**All We gathered in solidarity of sorrow
 and prepare to part
 with the promise of compassionate remembering –
 the cloth of our pains woven
 into a symbol of hope and of love.**

Reader And may the God of all compassion –
 himself acquainted with grief and anguish of heart
 walk alongside each of us over Christmas
 reminding us that the life started in a stable in Bethlehem
 opened the way to eternal life for us and for those we love.

And may the blessing of God,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
be with us all this night and all nights.

All Amen

