

Christmas is an especially poignant time, drawing on memories that reach as far back as childhood. Songs, sights and traditions all have rich emotions that give meaning to what we do in this season. The ancient story about the birth of Jesus is one of those treasures we hear and store away. Loved ones make up the memory treasures in our life. We remember those persons no longer with us through death, divorce, separation, or other loss.



Christmas is a lonely and painful time for many, in the midst of celebration and joy. The constant refrains about the happiness of the season, about getting together with family and friends, reminds many people of what they have lost.

It may be the first Christmas without a loved family member who has recently died. It may be a time that has always been difficult. We need the space and time to acknowledge our sadness; we need to know that we are not alone. We need encouragement to live the days ahead of us.

We can transform our past memories into rich treasures that give meaning and delight as we remember and tell stories about people important to us—especially at Christmas.

How can we sing a joyful song?  
O God, our sorrows hem us in.  
When pain and grief seem all too strong,  
How can we sing a joyful hymn?

The world around finds songs to sing  
Of laughter, mirth and happiness,  
But these sound false and even sting  
When what we feel is deep distress.

And yet, O God, we dare to sing  
For in our grief, we're not alone.  
You love this world and entered in  
By sending us your only Son.

You sent us hope — Emmanuel!  
O God-with-us, you bore our pain.  
And so we sing, for all is well!  
In Christ, we will be whole again.

*Biblical References: Psalm 137:1-6; John 3:16; Matthew 1:23  
© 2011 Carolyn Winfrey Gillette.*



Gracious God, you search us and know us in the places that we find ourselves:

between faith and doubt;  
hope and despair;  
light and darkness;  
love and fatigue of spirit;  
joy and harsh reality;  
peace and unrest.

We long to know Christmas - even if we celebrate it in a minor key.

The Christ candle is lit on the table - a reminder of Christ present with us, light in our darkness, pain, difficulty, loneliness, uncertainty and grief. You may wish to use the taper to light one or more of the tealight candles.



....to remember those whom we have loved and lost. To pause and remember their name, their face, their voice, the memory that binds them to us in this season.

*May God's eternal love surround them.*

.... to redeem the pain of the loss of someone important to us. To pause to gather up the pain and offer it to God, asking that from God's hands we receive the gift of peace.

*Refresh, restore, renew me O God; lead me into your future.*

.... to remember ourselves this Christmas. To pause and give thanks for all those who support us, and stand with us.

*The dawn defeats darkness, life overcomes death.*

..... to remember the gift of faith and hope which the Christmas story offers to us. God, who shares our life, promises us a place and time of no more pain and suffering.

*Jesus, God's own self in human flesh, shows the way, bringing truth and light.*

The story of the birth of Jesus is not to be told with a jolly voice and a merry ho-ho-ho.

It is the story of a teenage girl, pregnant with a child that is not her husband's. It is the story of a child born in a dirty animal stall. It is the story of a family of refugees who had to flee their homeland so that their child would not be killed. It is the story of one sent into the world in peace who was condemned to death. It is the story of God's never-ending, self-giving mercy which was rejected and condemned.

Mary was alone and afraid.  
*God exalted her among women.*  
The world was in darkness.  
*But God sent the light of life to shine.*  
The sorrowful grieved.  
*But God wipes away the tears.*  
The people rejected God.  
*But God embraces us.*



Christmas is the most wonderful time of the year, not because you have to be cheery and happy and merry - but because you don't. You can have heavy spirits and shattered dreams. Broken hearts and deep wounds. And still God comes to be with you.

Emmanuel, God is with us!  
Thanks be to God!

All around us are the sights and sounds of Christmas. But deep within us we carry our pain. Loneliness is a shawl we drape over our shoulders on empty nights.

We come to you, O God, bringing our gifts: not gold, frankincense and myrrh, but the grief that is the empty space in the closet filled with memories, the loss that is a sore which never heals, the bitterness that tastes like two-day old coffee.

In a season when so many people are time poor, we have all the time in the world to remember the loss that has stolen the joy of the season: to grieve over a job, a dream, a loved one we have lost.



Our fear of the future, our remembrance of the past; our pain which is difficult to bear and harder to release; our emptiness which cannot be filled with platitudes; our hands which cannot hold the ones we wish to embrace - all make this a season of long nights. So, be with us, we pray, in our loneliness, our longing, our loss, our lives.

*May God scatter the darkness of despair and brighten your hearts; and the blessing of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be upon you, and remain with you. Amen.*

## Blue Christmas

*A resource to give expression to the "blue" feelings we may have at Christmas time.*



### **Pilgrim Uniting Church**

12 Flinders Street, Adelaide

Ph: 8212 3295 [www.pilgrim.org.au](http://www.pilgrim.org.au)

Ministers

Rev Jana Norman  
Rev Sandy Boyce

