



Birchcliff Bluffs United Church

Ministers: All the People – wherever and however they gather

Minister of Word & Sacrament: Katie Vardy

Music Director: Randy Vancourt

December 21st, 2025

Blue Christmas

Gathering Music – Soft instrumental music or meditative carols

Welcome

Beloved friends, tonight we gather in the hush of Advent's shadows—not to deny the season's brightness, but to make gentle room for all that is tender, aching, or weary within us. Some of us come carrying fresh grief. Some carry an old grief that has never quite settled. Some hold anxieties that do not rest, or memories that stir unexpectedly. Some simply need a quiet holy place where no one demands cheerfulness, and no one asks us to "move on." Here, you are welcome. Here, you belong. Here, every honest feeling is safe. Here, the Holy One meets us as we truly are.

Land Acknowledgement

As we gather in this quiet and tender space, we acknowledge that we are on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Wendat, and the Mississaugas of the Credit, lands covered by Treaty 13. In this season of remembrance, we honour the Indigenous peoples who have cared for this land since time immemorial, and we commit ourselves to walking gently, seeking truth, justice, and healing for all who call this place home.

Hymn

All Who Are Thirsty (x2)

MV #4

All who are thirsty, all who are weak, come to the fountain.
Dip your heart in the stream of life.
Let the pain and the sorrow be washed away
in the waves of his mercy as deep cries out to deep.
We sing: Come, Lord Jesus, come.
Come, Lord Jesus, come. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Opening Prayer

Holy Presence,

You meet us in every season of the heart—

**in celebration and in sorrow, in the laughter that surprises and the tears
that will not stop.**

Gather us close this night.

Hold the stories held in our bodies, the memories we carry, the love that shaped us, the losses we name and those too deep for words.
Be the warmth around our wounds and the quiet between our breaths.
Guide us gently toward the promise that even here—especially here— we are not alone. Amen.

Hymn

Don't Be Afraid (x2)

MV #90

Don't be afraid. My love is stronger,
my love is stronger than your fear.
Don't be afraid. My love is stronger
and I have promised, promised to be always near.

LIGHTING OF CANDLES AND REFLECTION

Naming Our Loss

This season speaks of angels singing and stars shining, yet our hearts may feel dim or unsettled.

So tonight, we give ourselves permission to acknowledge what is missing, what changed too soon, what never arrived, what we hoped would be different.

We name before God the losses that press on our spirits:
loss of loved ones and companions in life...
loss of health or stability...
loss of relationships, dreams, identity, or direction...
loss of trust, of confidence, of the world as it once was.

We hold space for the griefs that do not fit neatly into words:
the grief of caring for others while running on empty,
the grief of unresolved conflict,
the grief of being overwhelmed in a world that moves too fast.

In the sacred quiet of this moment, you are invited to breathe deeply and simply let your heart be truthful with God.

(A minute of silence)

Lighting of Memorial Candles & Illumination of Memory Tree

Tonight, we gather in a tender rhythm of remembrance— a rhythm of flame, silence, and love. These candles mark the stories our hearts carry, and the Memory Tree stands among us as a quiet symbol of how light returns, even when nights are long.

As each candle is lit, I invite you to respond:

“Love remembers. Light endures”

We light this candle for those whose presence we miss deeply— family, friends, partners, companions— those who have shaped our lives and whose absence is felt keenly in this season.

Love remembers. Light endures.

(Candle is lit.)

We light this candle for the losses that came before we were prepared, for lives cut short, for goodbyes we never had the chance to say, for grief that still feels unfinished.

Love remembers. Light endures.

(Candle is lit.)

We light this candle for the losses we carry silently: changes in health, relationships, livelihood, identity, stability, direction, or hope. Losses that do not always have language but still weigh on the heart.

Love remembers. Light endures.

(Candle is lit.)

We light this candle for all who grieve—the lonely, the displaced, the overwhelmed, those impacted by conflict or injustice, those without safety, shelter, or peace. We honour the vastness of the world’s pain and the yearning for healing.

Love remembers. Light endures.

(Candle is lit.)

We light this candle for hope—not the bright, celebratory hope the season sometimes demands, but the gentle hope that rises slowly: a hope that waits with us, breathes with us, and keeps a soft flame lit within us.

Love remembers. Light endures.

(Candle is lit.)

Illumination of the Memory Tree

And now, we turn to our Memory Tree. This tree stands as a symbol of the memories we carry—the stories, names, and moments that continue to shine within us even when grief feels heavy.

As the lights are illuminated, may this tree become a gentle reminder that love does not end, that memory continues to glow, and that even in the depths of longing, there is a light that accompanies us. *(Memory Tree lights are turned on.)*

In our remembering and in our sorrow, we are held in God’s love. In our remembering and in our hope, we hold one another.

Reflection – The Light That Keeps Watch

Beloved friends, there is a reason we gather like this every December—in soft light, in quiet music, in gentle community. It is because this season has a way of stirring everything at once: the memories that warm us, the longings that ache within us, the

questions we thought we'd already answered, and the tears we thought had already fallen.

The world outside often seems to ask for brightness—smiles for photographs, cheerful conversations, a kind of “holiday spirit” that can feel out of reach when we are grieving, exhausted, or overwhelmed.

But the gospel meets us differently. The gospel meets us in the dark.

Jesus was not born into a world of twinkling lights and perfect harmony. He came in a time of deep political turmoil, amid a forced migration, to a family carrying anxiety and uncertainty, into a story where hope was not obvious and the future felt fragile.

His birth was, quite literally, a light in the darkness—but not a blinding light, not a demanding light, not a loud light. Instead, it was a small flame, flickering in a cold stable, steadily growing, quietly offering warmth to anyone who came near.

Tonight, we honour that kind of light—the light that keeps watch with us when nights are long and answers are few.

Because here is the truth Scripture keeps whispering: God does not wait for us to be cheerful before God draws near. God does not wait for our grief to be resolved before offering comfort. God does not wait for us to have it all together before calling us beloved.

Emmanuel—God with us—means God with us as we are. With us in our questions. With us in our sorrow. With us in our tiredness. With us in our empty chairs at Christmas dinner, our complicated memories, our loneliness that we hide from others. With us in our fractured world, our longing for peace, our prayers that feel heavy with history and heartbreak.

And if God is with us—even here, even now—then this night becomes something sacred.

This night becomes a reminder that healing does not come in one sweeping moment. It comes gently: in a memory shared, in a candle lit, in the clasp of a hand, in a breath that finally loosens the shoulders, in compassion that rises quietly, like dawn.

This night reminds us that grief and hope are not opposite forces—they are companions. They take turns guiding us. And hope is not the denial of grief; it is the courage to believe that grief does not have the final word.

So tonight, let us rest in the presence of the One who knows our stories, who hears our unspoken prayers, who cradles our losses with tenderness, and who keeps a small flame burning until our hearts are ready to carry the light again.

May that gentle light—Christ’s light—meet you exactly where you are, steadily, lovingly, faithfully, until morning comes. Amen.

Contemplative Music (*Tealight candles lit during song*)

As we listen to the music, I invite you to come forward—to light a candle on the tray, or to simply rest your hands over your heart. You may speak a name aloud, or hold your remembrance in silence.

Closing Prayer

Tender God,

You have received our stories tonight—

our tears and our longings, our anger and fatigue, our fragile hopes and stubborn faith.

Cradle our hearts as we rest.

Let your peace seep into the places where words cannot reach.

Restore in us a quiet trust that light returns, that love remains, that healing is possible, that joy—one day—will rise again.

Until then, keep watch with us, and help us keep watch with one another.

Amen.

Closing Hymn

Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying (x4) VU #400

Lord, listen to your children praying,
Lord, send your Spirit in this place;
Lord, listen to your children praying,
send us love, send us power, send us grace!

Blessing & Sending Forth

Go now into the night, held by a Love that will not let you go.

May the gentleness of Christ surround you,

the courage of the Spirit sustain you,

and the companionship of God meet you in every shadowed place.

And may the quiet star of hope

—small, steady, ancient—

guide your steps until morning comes. Amen.

Postlude

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