



Bright Wings

Creative Resources for Advent & Christmastide

Sacred Seasons, a quarterly series of worship packets with a peace and justice emphasis, from Seeds of Hope

Publishers: 602 James Avenue; Waco, TX 76706; Phone: 254/755-7745; Fax: 254/753-1909;

E-mail: seedseditor@clearwire.net; Web address: www.seedspublishers.org; © 2007

Sacred Seasons:

Creative Worship Tools for Your Church

These unique worship resource packets are available for the liturgical year, four packets a year for \$150 (\$165 for non-US subscriptions), one packet for \$60 (\$75 outside of the US).

Staff and Volunteers

Editor.....L. Katherine Cook
Business Manager.....Leslie Fontaine Rosencrans
Editorial Assistants.....Emily Benton,
Angela Desai, Brent Losak, Katherine Ramirez
Editorial Consultants.....Deborah Harris,
Dawn Ripley
Artists.....Robert Askins, Sally Askins,
Peter Yuichi Clark, Robert Darden, Van Darden,
Erin Kennedy Mayer, Lenora Mathis,
Kate Moore, Sharon Rollins, Susan Smith,
Rebecca Ward

2007 Council of Stewards

Dale A. Barron
H. Joseph Haag
Daniel B. McGee
Kathryn Mueller
Charles Reed
Jon Singletary
Ashley Bean Thornton
Seth J. Wispelwey

Statement of Purpose

Seeds of Hope, Inc., is a private, independent group of believers responding to a common burden for the poor and hungry of God's world, and acting on the strong belief that biblical mandates to feed the poor were not intended to be optional. The group intends to seek out people of faith who feel called to care for the poor; and to affirm, enable, and empower a variety of responses to the problems of poverty.

Editorial Address

Seeds of Hope is housed by the community of faith at Seventh and James Baptist Church.
Mailing address: 602 James; Waco, Texas 76706; Phone: 254/755-7745; Fax: 254/753-1909; E-mail: seedseditor@clearwire.net.
Web address: www.seedspublishers.org
Copyright © 2007. ISSN 0194-4495.

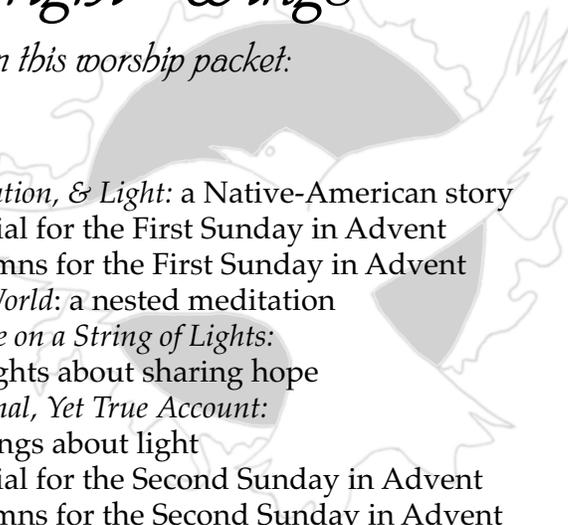
Material in this packet is for the use of the purchasing faith community to enhance worship and increase awareness in economic justice issues.

Seeds of Hope, Inc., holds the 501(c)3 nonprofit tax status. All contributions above the subscription rate are fully tax-deductible.

Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New Revised Standard Version, Copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission.

Bright Wings

in this worship packet:

- 
- 3-4 Bulletin art
5 *Advent Prayer*
6 *Ravens, Incarnation, & Light: a Native-American story*
7 Bulletin material for the First Sunday in Advent
8 Lessons & Hymns for the First Sunday in Advent
9 *Hope for Our World: a nested meditation*
10 *Taking a Chance on a String of Lights:*
some thoughts about sharing hope
11 *A Purely Fictional, Yet True Account:*
some musings about light
12 Bulletin material for the Second Sunday in Advent
13 Lessons & Hymns for the Second Sunday in Advent
14 *Peace in My Heart: a nested meditation*
15 Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings
16 Bulletin material for the Third Sunday in Advent
17 Lessons & Hymns for the Third Sunday in Advent
18 *Hard to Live in Joy: a nested meditation*
19 Bulletin material for the Fourth Sunday in Advent
20 Lessons & Hymns for the Fourth Sunday in Advent
21 *God's Love: a nested meditation*
22 Lessons & Hymns for Christmas Eve
23 Lessons & Hymns for Epiphany
24 Benediction

A Word About This Packet

The theme for this Advent resource is taken from the first two verses in Malachi 4 and a line in "God's Grandeur" by the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins. The cover art—inspired by the theme and by scriptures that refer to God's sheltering wings—is by Deborah Harris, who has written many things for Seeds, but has never tried drawing before.

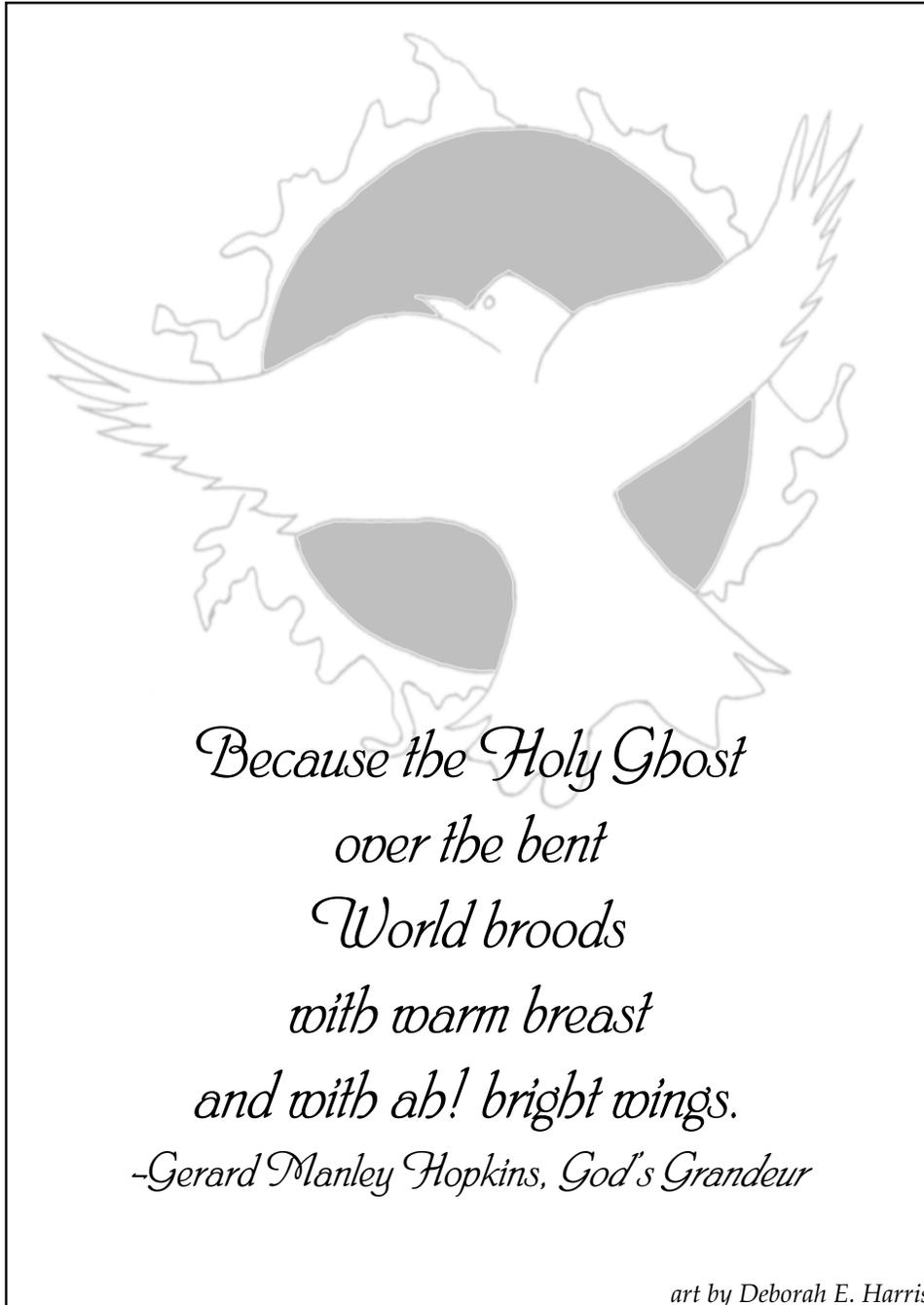
You will find, on page 5, a Native-American story that is also connected to the theme "Bright Wings." Some of the art is inspired by the raven story. The contents include four new nested meditations by Sharon Rollins, as well as lessons and hymns for the four Sundays in Advent. We also included lessons and hymns for Christmas Eve and Epiphany. The scriptures are drawn from lectionary texts for Year A.

As always, the material in this packet is for your congregation to use freely. We endeavored to keep in mind a variety of age groups, worship areas, events, and angles, so that you would have a potpourri of art and ideas from which to choose.

We make a conscious effort to maintain a balance between the apostolic and the contemplative—on the one hand, the dynamic challenge to stay true to God's mandate to feed the poor and struggle for justice, and on the other hand, our own compelling need for nurture and healing while we work toward those dreams. May it be so.

Gratefully, The Staff and Council of Stewards

Bulletin Art



Bulletin Art

art by Rebecca S. Ward



*See, the day is coming,
burning like an oven,
when all the arrogant and all evildoers
will be stubble;
the day that comes shall burn them up,
says the Lord of hosts,
so that it will leave them
neither root nor branch.
But for you who revere my name
the sun of righteousness shall rise,
with healing in its wings.
Malachi 4:1-2*



Advent Prayer

by Deborah E. Harris

Amazing God of Eternal Advent,

Birth us anew—even as we celebrate your birth—
from the wellspring of your passion and purpose.

Swaddle our fledgling faith in your tender mercies,
and nurture our growth in wisdom and grace.

Shelter us—as you protected the Holy Child from Herod’s sword—
from unprincipled leaders and deceitful power mongers,
from the love of money and indifference to human need and suffering,
from all that would harden our hearts and darken our minds.

Gather your children together
as a hen gathers her brood under her bright wings
that we may, with one voice, humbly proclaim:
“Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.”

Amen

—*Deborah Harris is a freelance writer and lyricist in Waco, Texas.*

art courtesy of Hermanoleon of the Franciscanos de Cruz Blanca

Ravens, Incarnation, & Light

Many North American First Nations cherish incarnational stories that sound quite familiar to those of us who were raised on the Infancy Narratives of the gospels—only the person who becomes flesh and dwells among the people is usually the Raven.

There are many stories about the Raven, and they differ from community to community. Some are stories about the Raven creating the first people. Others are stories of mischief being perpetrated by the Raven.

In one Tsimshian story, the Raven caused himself to be born by the daughter of a chief in order to restore light to the world. Here's how the story goes:

Long ago, the only light in the world was usurped by a greedy old chief who refused to share it. Raven decided that this would not do, so he turned himself into a cedar leaf and fluttered surreptitiously into the chief's dwelling.

The chief's daughter was sipping a drink and Raven fluttered into the cup as she raised it to her lips. In some stories the Raven turned into a pine needle that floated down the river, and the chief's daughter drank from the river. However she ended up swallowing him, she immediately became pregnant, and eventually gave birth to a baby boy. This, of course, caused a great deal of confusion and consternation.

The baby had raven-black hair, dark glowing eyes, and was very temperamental. Whenever he was bored, he shrieked. The chief, in an effort to make the baby stop shrieking, told the women to give him whatever he wanted. First, they gave him a bag of shining stars. He played merrily with these, until one day he threw them through the smoke hole in the ceiling and they scattered up into the sky.

Then the baby became

bored again, and began crying. His cries were driving the household crazy. To pacify him, they gave him another bag, this time containing the moon. The baby was happy again, bouncing the moon all over. But soon the moon went out the smoke hole, and stayed in the sky.

Then the baby became disruptive again. Different people tried giving him various toys, but he wouldn't stop crying. He pointed to a third bag in the house. The family reluctantly gives him the bag, saying, "Be careful—don't untie this. It's Light."

Then the baby turned back into Raven and flew out of the smoke hole with the bag in his beak. Then he untied the bag, and Light was restored to the world. The chief was very, very angry, but there wasn't anything he could do about it.

Many communities celebrate this story with pageants and dances that re-enact the events of the story.

—Seeds staff. Sources: *The Gods of North America*

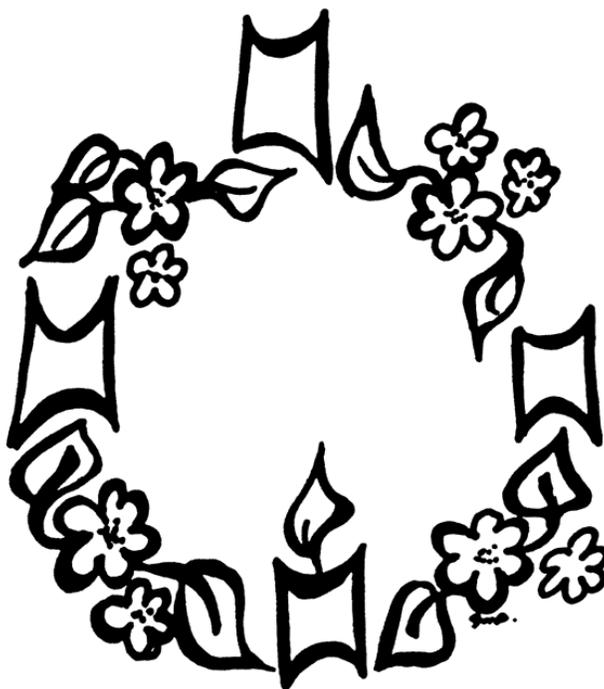


art by Peter Yuichi Clark

First Sunday in Advent

*We lift the light of hope, O God,
Your presence burning bright.
In praise we sing the gift You bring:
Our hope complete in Christ.
In praise we sing the gift You bring:
Our hope complete in Christ.
—Ken Bible*

*The night is far gone, the day is near.
Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light...
—Romans 13:12*



art by Susan Daily

Lessons & Hymns for the First Sunday in Advent

Reading from the Propbets

Isaiah 2:1-5

Meditation

The story began with a girl hardly old enough to have a any child let alone this child. Nazareth was a rundown village in an obscure province of Rome. Mary was a simple peasant girl with no status, no identifiable qualifications, seemingly no preparations for such a role. The angel looked several times to make sure the address was right.
—Brett Younger, “The First Christmas Carol”

Hymn

“We Lift the Light of Hope”

We lift the light of hope, O God,
Your presence burning bright.
In praise we sing the gift You bring:
Our hope complete in Christ.
In praise we sing the gift You bring:
Our hope complete in Christ.

We lift the light of peace, O God,
The Lord of truth and right.
In Your domain let justice reign
And bring us peace in Christ.
In Your domain let justice reign
And bring us peace in Christ.

We lift the light of joy, O God.
Your praise is our delight!
Your blessings flow that all may know
Unbounded joy in Christ.
Your blessings flow that all may know
Unbounded joy in Christ.

We lift the light of love, O God,
Your candle in our night.
You come to give and help us live
The mighty love of Christ.
You come to give and help us live

The mighty love of Christ.

We lift the light of Christmas day
And greet eternal life.
Now hope and peace and joy and love
Are born in Jesus Christ.
Now hope and peace and joy and love
Are born in Jesus Christ.

Words by Ken Bible

Music by Oliver Holden

© 2005 by LNWhymns.com. CCLI Song #4465083.

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 122

Meditation

Advent is the waiting season, hoping to be rediscovered. She is seasoned waiting, wishing wisdom and pregnant with promised life. She is a season conceived every day.
—Joseph J. Juknialis

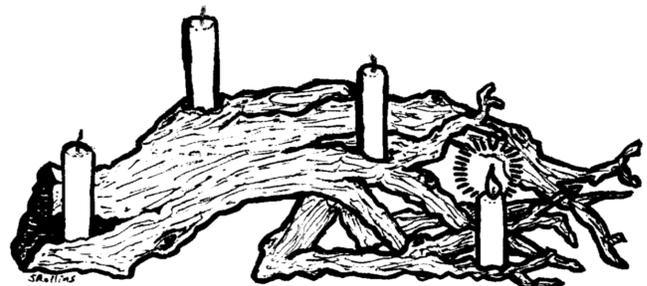
Reading from the Epistles

Romans 13:11-14

Hymn

Gospel Reading

Matthew 24: 36-44

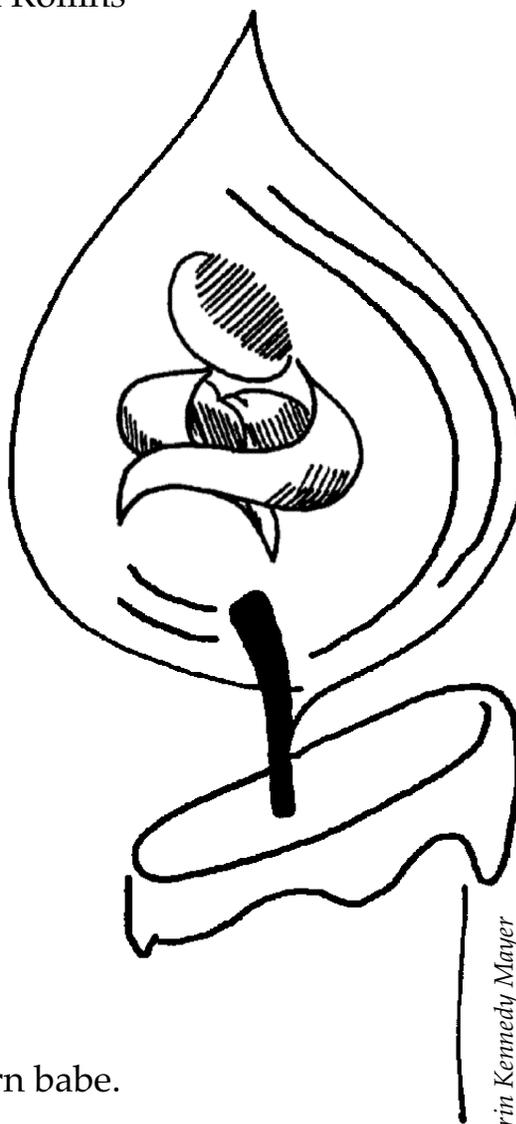


art by Sharon R. Rollins

Hope for Our World

a nested meditation

by Sharon Rollins



art by Erin Kennedy Mayer

Hope!

Hope for our world!

Hope, for our world cries out as a newborn babe.

Hope, for our world cries out.
As a newborn babe arrives,
We hope for healing and harmony.

—Sharon Rollins is a family therapist in Waco, Texas. She serves as a deacon and teaches children’s Sunday school at Seventh & James Baptist Church.

Author’s note: My “nested” meditations are inspired by Kevin Anderson’s *Divinity in Disguise*. The layering and repetition of the words and phrases bring new and added meaning with each reading. Anderson recommends they be read aloud with pause for reflective breaths between stanzas in order to draw meaning from each layer as well as the whole.

Taking a Chance on a String of Lights

by Sharlande Sledge

Recently, as I drove down North 18th Street and delighted in the multi-colored Christmas lights edging the porches and windows, I thought about a drive I made from San Angelo back to Waco a few years ago. As I drove east into the deepening December darkness, the final phases of the sunset reflected in my rearview mirror.

In the wide-open spaces of West Texas, even the Dairy Queens are few and far between. Heeding the protective advice to watch for deer, I counted on peripheral vision and good headlights to get me safely down the road toward home. Somewhere out there were fields of sheep, landmarks of daytime traveling.

That night ride could have been a long one indeed had it not been for the lights along the way. The courthouse in Ballinger was covered with hundreds of necklaces of tiny white bulbs streaming down the rooftop to the ground. On down the road, a gas station wore brilliant green, red, orange, blue and white lights around its Texaco sign, the bigger bulbs I remember from my childhood Christmas trees.

Then space, space, and more space. But sprinkled into the space was light. Far in the distance I could see a farmhouse framed in the brilliance of multi-colored lights. Farther still, a ranch home beamed a brilliant blue star from its rooftop; a column of trees I never would have seen except for the strings of lights wrapped around them like candy cane stripes. Someone's artistry magically transformed a two-story home into a sleigh and etched onto the horizon the outline of an unlikely duo—an enormous angel and reindeer.

Emerging from the darkness north and south of the highway, the Christmas lights distinguished themselves from all other lights. They endeared themselves to me. I imagined the people who flicked on the switches each night, sending flashes of brightness into the surrounding darkness. Maybe a passing driver would see them; maybe not. It was

the delight in celebrating that mattered. The season called for light for the sake of Light: someone to punch holes in the night so light could shine through.

This season, as more and more lights appear on country landscapes and city streets, we bring out all the small things that shine, glimmer, sparkle and shimmer. We place stars on the tops of trees, tie packages with extravagant silver ribbons, dress

Maybe a passing driver would see them; maybe not. It was the delight in celebrating that mattered. The season called for light for the sake of Light: someone to punch holes in the night so light could shine through.

children in dazzling angel wings for their pageants, place candles just a breath away; wear our starriest earrings, eat Hershey Kisses wrapped in shiny red and green foil, let children sprinkle glitter on construction paper and excuse the gold flecks in the carpet, and hang banners with words that shine: *brightness, extravagant, imagine, great joy*. These things we do naturally and rightly.

But we also do the flip side instinctively; we turn down the lights and sing songs with words like *silent, holy, calm, tender, mild, heavenly, and peaceful*. Rather than put on our blinders and place all our expectations on the big day of the season, we ready ourselves little by little. We read scripture with words like *abiding, ponder, fear not, wait, and prepare*.

It's the little lights of preparation that move us meaningfully toward Christmas. Were we to be surrounded by all the light at once, we would be overwhelmed, blinded, as though our eyes were caught in a million camera flashes at once. We would be "sore afraid," as the shepherds were. So God gives us light gradually, when we are ready for it, to help

us move down the road, even when – maybe especially when – we do not feel like getting the lights out of the attic and “festive” isn’t in our vocabulary.

That’s when the little lights are all the more precious. Maybe it’s why some people take a chance on strings of lights to bring joy. I wish I had a picture of the members of our church wrapping flashlights for the children of our Self-Sufficiency ministry, superimposed on a picture of those children unwrapping their gifts and shining them all around the sanctuary walls.

I hope that on a drive to see the Christmas lights, I’ll include the crowded motel-room “home” we visited one Wednesday and see the lights of the tiny tree shining through the window. I want to remember listening to a friend in hospice care tell

the story behind each of her ornaments as I hung them on her tree; I was participating in a small, shining ceremony of light.

When our congregation sings, “hope is a star that shines in the night, leading us on till the morning is bright,” I hope I’ll pay attention to the tears streaming down my face in the wonder of God’s love and the love of all those I love.

“The light shines in the deepest night, and the night did not overcome it.” In these coming days, when the earth is turning deeply into the long darkness of winter, look for “little lights” heralding the coming Light. These signs give glimmers of hope that Christ is coming soon to illuminate the darkness forever. “Arise, shine for your light is come!”

—Sharlande Sledge is associate pastor of Lake Shore Baptist Church in Waco, Texas.



A Purely Fictional, Yet True, Account

by James M. Kennedy

The following is a translation of an ancient, recently discovered fragment of a larger text. That this is a purely fictional fragment and that the text from which it originally came did not, in fact, exist, are irrelevant distractions. You can, nevertheless, see that it is completely true. Please note, I have indicated gaps in the fragment. It goes as follows:

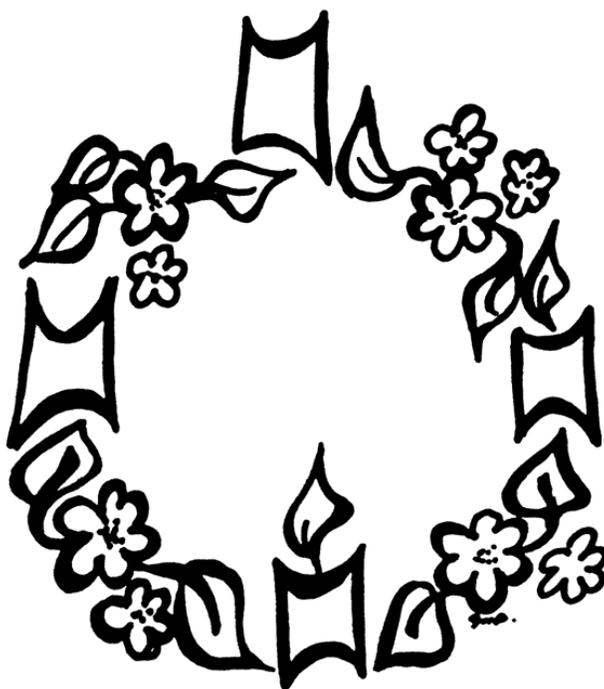
[...] then the Lord said to the [...], “Shed your lights upon the world.” But the stars [...] tears instead and so they did not shine. Then the Lord commanded, “Illuminate the heavens.” Yet, the light bearers of the sky [...] and all was dark. Then the Lord saw that gloom spread over the [...] and the bad deeds of humans blotted out [...] like heavy curtains hanging from the sky. But the Lord is rich in power and great in mercy. He sent a message to all humankind. “Arise and shine, for your light shall come. The glory of the Lord shall come and rise over you.” Many years passed. But at the right [...], the Lord, who is [...] asked the stars for volunteers but most of them were such a small star. Nevertheless, go and shine, Show the [...] where they can find the light of the world that is coming to give all people light.” And so the star strained with all its power until it blew up and the force of its great blast tossed it all the way from Persia to Beth [...]. And so did it shine and it shines in our [...] to this day.

—Jim Kennedy teaches Hebrew Scriptures in the Department of Religion at Baylor University

Second Sunday in Advent

*We lift the light of peace, O God,
The Lord of truth and right.
In Your domain let justice reign
And bring us peace in Christ.
In Your domain let justice reign
And bring us peace in Christ.
—Ken Bible*

*They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full
of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.
—Isaiah 11:9*



art by Susan Daily

Lessons & Hymns for the Second Sunday in Advent

Reading from the Prophets

Isaiah 11:1-10

Meditation

This Christmas season finds us a rather bewildered human race. We have neither peace within nor peace without. Everywhere, paralyzing fears harrow people by day and haunt them by night. Our world is sick with war; everywhere we turn, we see its ominous possibilities. And yet, my friends, the Christmas hope for peace and good will toward all can no longer be dismissed as a kind of pious dream of some utopian. If we don't have good will toward all people in this world, we will destroy ourselves by the misuse of our own instruments and our own power.

—Martin Luther King, Jr., in his last Christmas message, December 24, 1967

Hymn

“Peace, Peace, Peace”

Peace, peace, peace—
The gift of Christ is peace.
We walk with God, our past forgiven.
All in Him is life and heaven.
Peace, peace, peace—
The gift of Christ is peace.

Hope, hope, hope—
The light of Christ is hope.
In all our darkness Christ is shining,
Leading upward, faith refining.
Hope, hope, hope—
The light of Christ is hope.

Love, love, love—
The heart of Christ is love.
On all who come He pours His presence—
Life and love in holy essence.
Love, love, love—
The heart of Christ is love.

Joy, joy, joy—

We praise You, Christ, with joy!
Our peace, our hope, our love and treasure,
Highest calling, deepest pleasure!
Joy, joy, joy—
We praise You, Christ, with joy!

Words by Ken Bible

Music: Traditional Austrian Melody;

arr. by Ken Bible

© 2006 by LNWhymns.com. CCLI Song #4663940.

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19

Reading from the Epistles

Romans 15:4-13

Hymn

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

Text: 12th-century Latin hymn,
translated by John M. Neale, 1851;
(verses added by Henry Sloane Coffin, 1916)

Music: 15th-century French;
arrangement & harmony by Thomas Helmore, 1856
Tune: VENI EMMANUEL, Meter: LM with Refrain

Meditation

In the face of all our realities:
We are the people who heal each other,
who grow strong together,
who name the truth,
who know what it means to live in community,
moving toward a common dream
for a new heaven and a new earth
in the power of the love of God,
the company of Jesus Christ
and the leading of the Holy Spirit.
—Dorothy McRae-MacMahon,
Echoes of Our Journey, Liturgies of the People

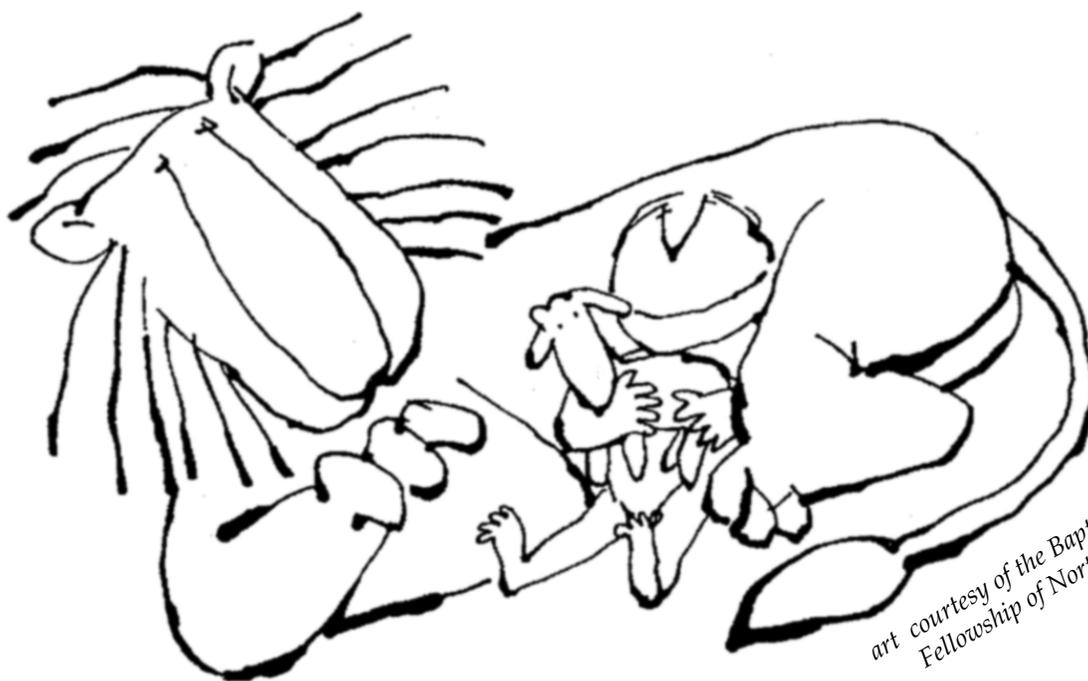
Gospel Reading

Matthew 3:1-12

Peace in My Heart

a nested meditation

by Sharon Rollins



art courtesy of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America

There's a peace in my heart.

There's a piece in my heart gone astray.

There's a piece in my heart gone astray,
Caught up in the midst of chaos and envy.

There's a piece in my heart—
Gone astray; Caught up!
In the midst of chaos and envy,
The child will bring healing and peace!

—Sharon Rollins is a family therapist in Waco, Texas. She serves as a deacon and teaches children's Sunday school at Seventh & James Baptist Church.

Author's note: My "nested" meditations are inspired by Kevin Anderson's Divinity in Disguise. The layering and repetition of the words and phrases bring new and added meaning with each reading. Anderson recommends they be read aloud with pause for reflective breaths between stanzas in order to draw meaning from each layer as well as the whole.

Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings

Kairos is the opportunity to bring Christ—the Prince of Peace—into every situation, every conversation, every decision and choice of our daily lives. It is the way to re-direct the energy of fear into the actions of Micah 6:8. Fear paralyzes. Where there is no movement, there is no hope. Re-directing the energy produced by fear into actions of justice, compassion, and humble service activates hope. Hope swells the light. Light by light, it overcomes all darkness.

—Carol Mason

Christmas speaks above all else to the poor and homeless, the hungry, oppressed, and friendless of our world. We must never let ourselves forget that, or our celebrations will be false as Santa's whiskers. But it also speaks to those who are burdened in any way, whether with regrets for the past, heartache in the present or foreboding of the future. God says to us this night, "Be strong, fear not, for I am with you. I am for you and I will never let you go. Here is my son to prove it."

—J. Barrie Shepherd

Christmas is about the King of Glory joining the ranks of the rabble to be our God and to know us. I am that rabble, and I am grateful.

—Paula Clouse, *Order of Ecumenical Franciscans*

It might be easy to run away to a monastery, away from the commercialization, the hectic hustle, the demanding family responsibilities of Christmas-time. Then we would have a holy Christmas. But we would forget the lesson of the Incarnation, of the enfleshing of God—the lesson that we who are followers of Jesus do not run from the secular; rather we try to transform it. It is our mission to make holy the secular aspects of Christmas

just as the early Christians baptized the Christmas tree. And we do this by being holy people—kind, patient, generous, loving, laughing people—no matter how maddening is the Christmas rush.

—Fr. Andrew Greeley

I cannot give in to the political theologies marched around nativity scenes in the public square that are loath to admit that Jesus came into the world to comfort the despised, love his enemies, reject exclusionary practices, defend the poor, heal the sick, feed the hungry, feast with sinners, disclose the God of radical welcome, and die in order to save us...

—Harld J. Recinos, *Professor of Church and Society at Perkins School of Theology, from "What Child is This? And What Does He Ask of Us?" in the Dallas Morning News December 25, 2005*



*How precious is your steadfast love, O
God! All people may take refuge in the
shadow of your wings.*

Psalm 36:7

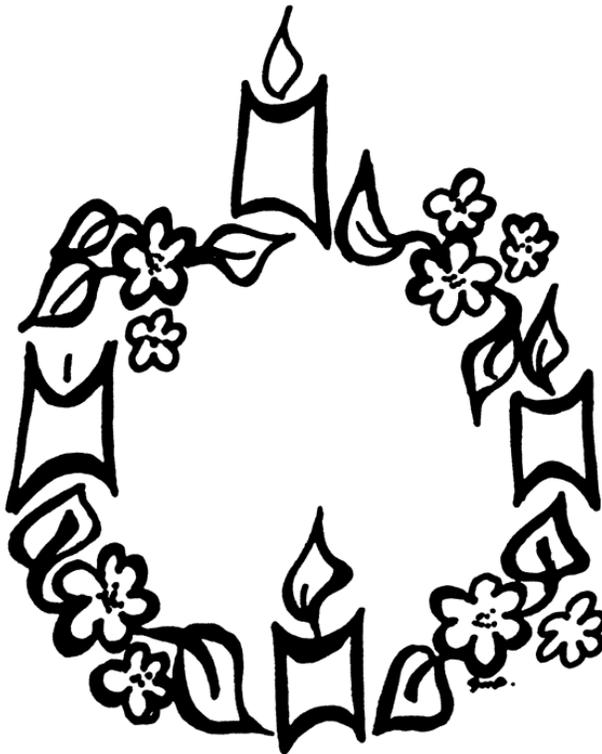
*...for you have been my help, and in the
shadow of your wings I sing for joy.*

Psalm 63:7

Third Sunday in Advent

*We lift the light of joy, O God.
Your praise is our delight!
Your blessings flow that all may know
Unbounded joy in Christ.
Your blessings flow that all may know
Unbounded joy in Christ.
—Ken Bible*

*Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue
of the speechless sing for joy.
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;
—Isaiah 35:6*



art by Susan Daily

Lessons & Hymns for the Third Sunday in Advent

Reading from the Prophets

Isaiah 35:1-10

Meditation

They say
that today the sun began to return,
or (in our newer scientific knowledge)
the earth began to move closer to the sun,
but how do I know this is so?
The day lengthens, but imperceptibly.
How do I know the sun has really begun to return?
How do I know she is real?
How do I know that she is who they say she is?
Is it really becoming warmer,
or are we abandoned to the darkness
and cold
and death?

It is good that we celebrate holy days at this time,
for the darkness is deep.
It is a good time of year
to watch for sunreturn.
It is a good time to listen for newborn cries.
Katie Cook, "Soltice Song"

Hymn

"The Promise"

The Promise is a vision,
A future far away.
The Promise is reality.
The Promise is today.

Refrain:

O come embrace the Promise!
O come and live the joy!
O come and love the Living Christ,
Sweet Mary's little boy!

The Promise comes in darkness,
Surprising us at night.
The Promise is surprising Love.

The Promise is our Light.

The Promises are many.
The Promises are one.
The Promises are Jesus Christ.
The Promises have come.

The Promise is great blessing.
The Promise is great wealth.
The Promise is Eternal Life.
The Promise is Himself.

Words by Ken Bible

Music: Traditional English Melody; arr. by Ken Bible
© 2000 by LNWhymns.com. CCLI Song #3309896.

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 146:4-9

Meditation

The best metaphor for our world of today is
astronauts speeding through the cosmos, but with
their life-supporting capsule pierced by a meteorite
fragment. But the church resembles Mary and Joseph
traveling from Egypt to Nazareth on a donkey,
holding in their arms the weakness and poverty of
the Child Jesus: God incarnate.
—Carlo Carretto

Reading from the Epistles

James 5:7-10

Hymn

"Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus"
Text: Charles Wesley, 1744
Music: Rowland H. Pritchard, 1830;
harmony from The English Hymnal
Tune: HYFRYDOL, Meter: 87.87 D

Gospel Reading

Matthew 11:2-11

Hard to Live in Joy

a nested meditation

by Sharon Rollins



It is hard to live in joy.

It is hard to live.
Enjoy living while children starve?

It is hard to live in joy.
Living while children starve,
While wars rip lives apart?

It is hard to live in joy.
Living while children starve,
While wars rip lives?
Apart from the promised birth, we could not live in joy.))

— Sharon Rollins is a family therapist in Waco, Texas. She serves as a deacon and teaches children's Sunday school at Seventh & James Baptist Church.

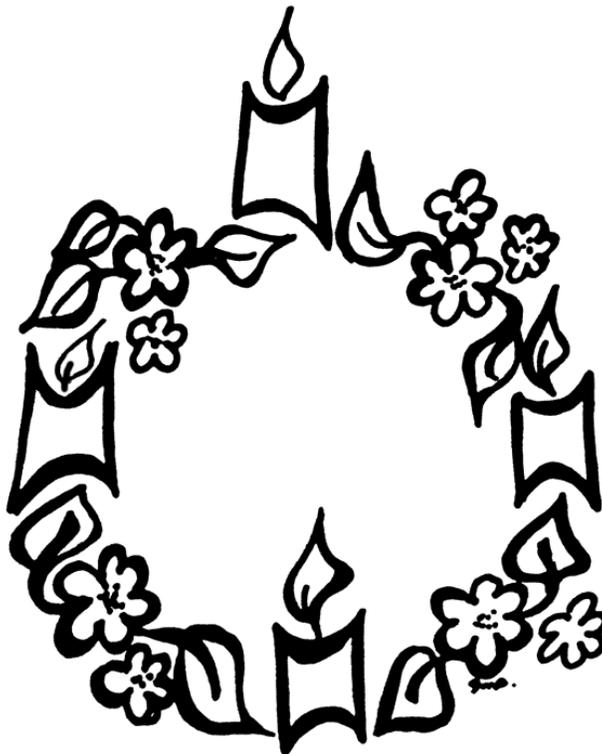
Author's note: My "nested" meditations are inspired by Kevin Anderson's Divinity in Disguise. The layering and repetition of the words and phrases bring new and added meaning with each reading. Anderson recommends they be read aloud with pause for reflective breaths between stanzas in order to draw meaning from each layer as well as the whole.

art by Rebecca S. Ward

Fourth Sunday in Advent

*We lift the light of love, O God,
Your candle in our night.
You come to give and help us live
The mighty love of Christ.
You come to give and help us live
The mighty love of Christ.
—Ken Bible*

*Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; let your face shine,
that we may be saved.
—Psalm 80:19*



art by Susan Daily

Lessons & Hymns for the Fourth Sunday in Advent

Reading from the Prophets

Isaiah 7:10-16

Meditation

How is a year of spent love
emptied into Christmas letters
for distant friends?
Can nerves and sinew,
tears and laughter,
be pressed between wet pages?
How is friendship—love—ever
shared
through the aching insufficiency of
words?

These are questions that
rent God's heart for centuries
in [God's] own breakdown of language.
Until, at last, God tore from [God's] side
the son of [God's] anguished old age
and sent him
bloody, squalling, and alive
to Bethlehem,
where language and love
and even God
became new.
—Belden C. Lane

Hymn

"Prayer for God's Presence"

I am weak, I am poor,
Filled with fear and pride;
Without You, living God,
Dry and dead inside;
Full of plans, full of self,
Chasing my own way;
Running here, running there,
No time left to pray.
I am weak, I am poor,
Empty now within;

Come, O God, heal my life,
Make me whole again.

You are love, only love,
Mercy through and through.
You are God, You are here—
I will look to You.
Come, my Lord, be in me
All You long to be—
Every thought, every hope,
Every breath I breathe.
You are love, only love—
Lead in all I do.
Let me live, loving Lord,
Evermore in You.

Words by Ken Bible

Music by Antonin Dvorak; arr. by Ken Bible

© 2000 by LNWhymns.com. CCLI Song #3309078.

Reading from the Psalms

Psalms 80:1-7, 16-18

Meditation

And where there is no love, put love, and you shall
find love.

—St. John of the Cross

Reading from the Epistles

Romans 1:1-7

Hymn

"Thou Hidden Love of God"

Text: Gerhard Tersteegen, 1697-1769;

translated by John Wesley, 1703-1791

Music: Geistliche Lieder; harmony by J. S. Bach

Tune: VATER UNSER, Meter: 88.88.88

Gospel Reading

Matthew 1:18-25

God's Love

a nested meditation

by Sharon Rollins



God's love is!

God's love is like a drop in the ocean.

God's love is like a drop in the ocean.
It radiates and ripples, tossing our lives and souls all about.

God's love is like a drop in the ocean.
It radiates and ripples, tossing our lives and souls.
All about us will be rocked, by God's forthcoming gift.

— Sharon Rollins is a family therapist in Waco, Texas. She serves as a deacon and teaches children's Sunday school at Seventh & James Baptist Church.

Author's note: My "nested" meditations are inspired by Kevin Anderson's Divinity in Disguise. The layering and repetition of the words and phrases bring new and added meaning with each reading. Anderson recommends they be read aloud with pause for reflective breaths between stanzas in order to draw meaning from each layer as well as the whole.

Second note: The line "...love is like a drop in the ocean" is from U2's Yahweh by Bono with The Edge.

art is courtesy of Hermanoleon of the Franciscanos de Cruz Blanca

Lessons & Hymns for Christmas Eve

Reading from the Prophets

Isaiah 9:2-7

Litany:

ONE: The Christ Candle is burning; the hour draws near;

MANY: the stillness of the watchful night comes on us.

ONE: Hush! No idle words!

MANY: No tinkling sound of temple or bazaar!

ONE: Only deep silence!

MANY: Only the pregnant plentitude of mystery!

ONE: We stand with open mouths.

MANY: We cannot fathom how the Word again is flesh and dwells among us.

—from “Eve of Nativity” by C. W. (Wally) Christian

Meditation

Build a ring of quiet around Christmas Eve. Tread softly, give it space. Listen, watch, observe.

Christmas is living and many layered. It is peace; yet it is extreme crisis as reflected in the gospel stories of King Herod’s massacre of the children of Bethlehem. Christmas is crisis, but in the darkest hour of the darkest night, the tide begins to turn. Christmas Eve is suspense: “the hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight.” A miracle is happening and it includes us. It is just downstairs, by the tree, by the fire, outside your door, in the holy darkness.

—Nikki Simpson

Hymn

“Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence”

Text: Liturgy of St. James, (4th Cent),

Adapted by Gerard Moultrie, 1864;

Music: 17th-century French;

Harmony from the English Hymnal, 1906

Tune: PICARDY

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 96

Meditation

How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given. I would be silent now, Lord, and expectant...that I may receive the gift I need, so I may become the gift others need.

—Ted Loder

First Gospel Reading

John 1:1-14

Hymn

“Silent Night, Holy Night”

Text: Joseph Mohr, circa 1816-1818;

trans. by John F. Young, 1820-1885

(stanzas 1, 2, 3) and anon.(stanza 4)

Music: Franz Gruber, circa 1820

Tune: *STILLE NACHT*, Meter: *Irr*.

Second Gospel Reading

Luke 2:1-14, (15-20)



art courtesy of the
Second Baptist
Church in Suffield,
Connecticut

Lessons & Hymns for Epiphany

Reading from the Prophets

Isaiah 60:1-6

Hymn

“Star in the East”

Text: J. M. Lowrie

Music: William A. Ogden

in *The Silver Song* by William A. Ogden

Toledo, Ohio: W. W. Whitney, 1870

Meditation

Somewhere in the darkness
of our wisdom
love labored once again
to show its cause:
how to communicate to distant people
something of their value
to the Maker of them all;
searching for a gesture that might say it all,
love reached deep inside itself—
and shaped a fragile child,
took it gently to a quiet corner of the world,
and trusted it to people
too young and poor to be spoiled.
—Daniel G. Bagby

Reading from the Psalms

Psalms 72:1-7, 10-1

Hymn

“The Kings of the East are Riding”

Text: Katharine L. Bates (1859-1929)

Music: “Wallace Hamilton,”

Clarence G. Hamilton (1865-1935)

Reading from the Epistles

Ephesians 3:1-12

Litany

ONE: Well, so that is that. Now we dismantle the

tree, take down the lights, sweep up the broken ornaments, put away the shepherd’s costumes. The excitement, the bustle of Christmas, the lights and trees and carols, are gone for another year. What do we have left?

MANY: We have a new page on which to write, a new vision, a new task. We have the chance to watch and listen for God’s new surprises.

ONE: For just one moment we looked again into the Stable and saw the Child. For just that moment we saw the vision of love and joy and peace. Do we put that away with the cards we received? How can we keep that vision?

MANY: We can keep our eyes on the Christ Child, as he grows, and as he give himself in death. We can still be watching as he rises from the tomb with the greatest surprise of all.

ONE: But now the sparkle is gone. There are bills to be paid, a house to clean, a job to do. January is a bleak month. What do we look forward to?

MANY: We have a whole new year before us: days to accomplish God’s purposes, days to see the sunshine and watch the flowers grow, days to share with friends. We have three hundred and sixty-five presents from God, gift-wrapped, and waiting to be opened.

ALL: God of the past and the future, so much is ahead of us. So much can be done in this new year. Open our eyes, God, that we may see each new day as the gift that it is. May we open it, expecting your surprise. Amen.

—adapted by Katie Cook from W.H. Auden’s “For the Time Being”

Gospel Reading

Matthew 2:1-12

Benediction



*In the somewhat frenzied aspects of the season,
and wars and rumours of wars
and pestilence and hope and despair
and engaging the powers
I keep a supporting image of God coming to us as individuals,
or stepping into the midst of conflict,
holding out a swaddled infant to us and saying
“Here, hold this for me, will you?”
—Cam Watts*