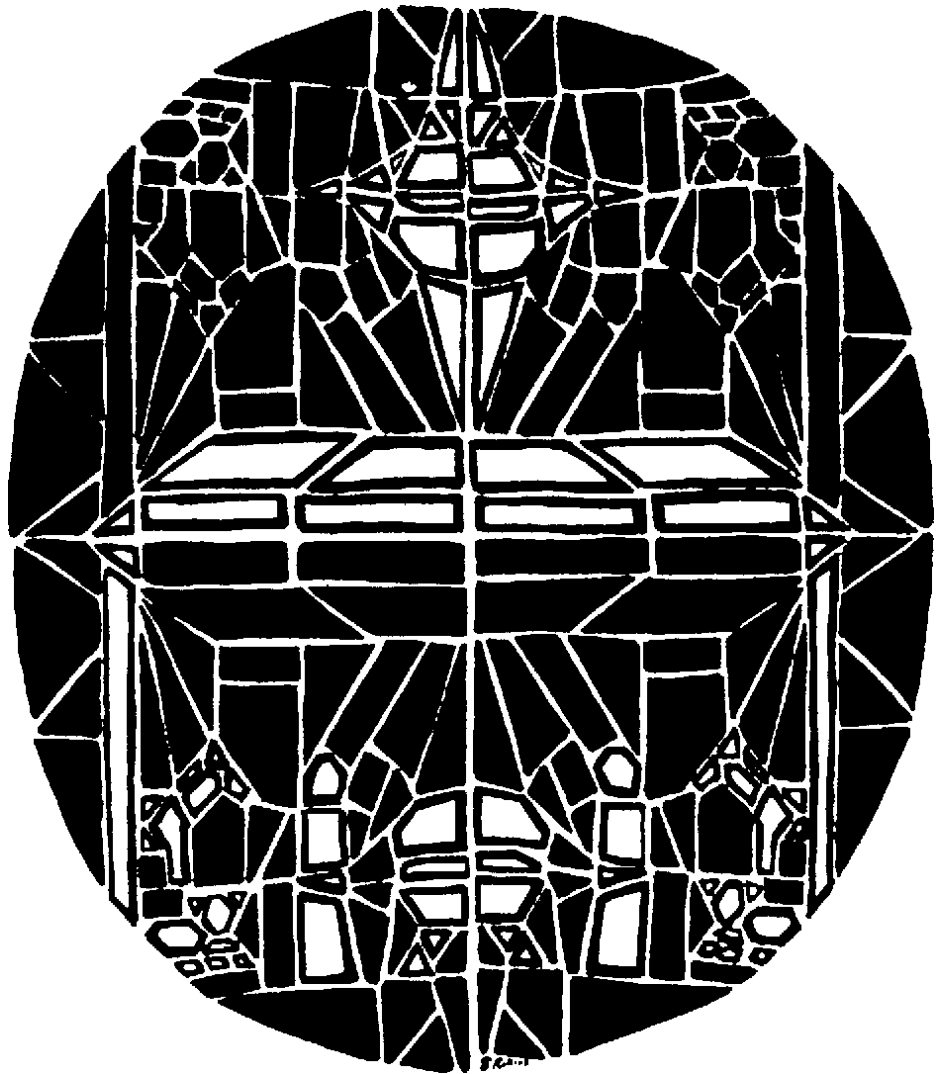


The Word Made Flesh

...a worship packet for
Advent and Christmastide



*Worship tools with a peace and justice emphasis from Seeds of Hope Publishers, people you've come to trust:
602 James; Waco, TX 76706; Phone: 254/755-7745; Fax: 254/753-1909; E-mail: SeedsHope@aol.com.*

Worship Resources

from

Seeds of Hope Publishers

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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

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

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The Word Made Flesh



Lenora Mathis

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for the birthday
of Martin Luther King, Jr.

a word about this packet

These materials are offered to you on clean, unattached pages so that you can more easily photocopy anything you wish to duplicate. Feel free to copy any of this, including art, and adapt these tools to your needs.

The art on the cover is by Sharon Rollins, a long-time Seeds artist and writer. Other new art in this packet was done especially for you by Sharon, and by Lenora Mathis, a senior at Midway High School in Woodway, Texas.

The material in this packet is your congregation's to use freely. We have tried to pull together resources that can be used during Advent and Christmastide, as well as some resources for Epiphany. This year we added some resources for Martin Luther King's birthday.

We have also tried to provide these tools to you in a user-friendly, yet attractive presentation. We endeavored to choose 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.

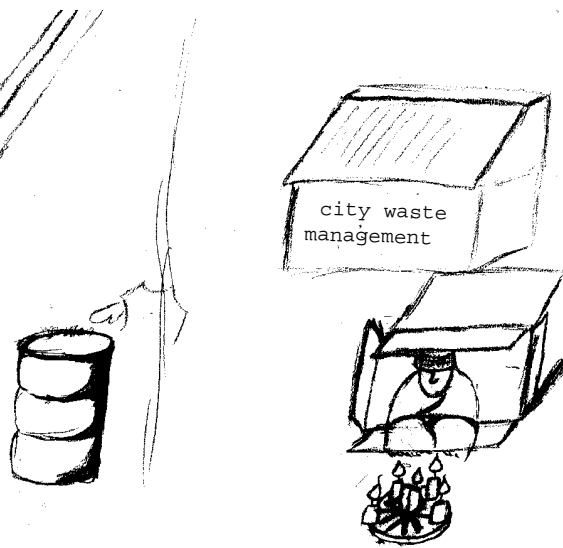
We make a conscious effort to maintain a balance between the apostolic and the contemplative—on the one hand, the dynamic challenge to stay true to God's mandate to feed the poor and see to the struggle for justice, and on the other hand, our own compelling need for nurture and healing while we work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

We prayerfully hope that these aids will enhance your congregation's winter worship experiences and, at the same time, help you to creatively raise awareness of the needs of God's people.

an advent promise

Lenora Mathis

This year
I promise to do it better...
This year I swear
I will not slouch toward Bethlehem
like Yeats's beast.
This year I will not
Be caught in the stores
with the Santas and the reindeer
When it is time to be at the stable
with God's sheep
This time I will search harder
for that place where tradition
encompasses incarnation
and not just empty nostalgia.
This year I will not allow agenda anxiety
to keep me from seeing the beaten man
on the side of the road,
to make me forget that this is not just a time
for festive encounters,
for families and friends to gather
and warm each other with eggnog;
but that it is also a time
when,
as the Ghost of Christmas Present said,
Hunger
and Want
and Loneliness
are most keenly felt;
that it is also a time when people
are driven to total despair.
This year I will remember
that there are those whom God loves



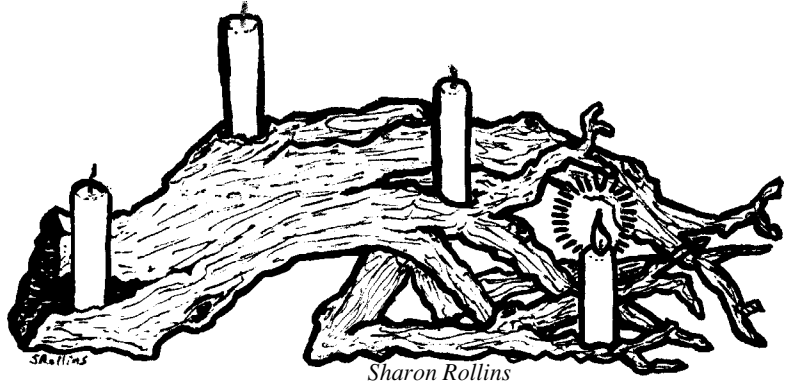
~~who have not the resources of celebration;~~
for some, no gifts of tinsel
because they are poor;
for some, no joy or beauty
because they are broken in spirit;
for some, no family or friends to gather
because they have no one in this world.

There are times when I enjoy
seeing those who already abound;
There are friends with whom
I would prefer to sing the carols,
Friends for whom I would rather spend my resources.
I must remember that God expects more
from me
than to surround myself with those
whom I find lovely,
with those who already know love.
This year I must balance my own needs—
to be loved
to be nurtured
to be entertained—
With those of God's other children.
Especially their need for me.
For what is Christmas, anyway?
What is Advent, if it is not Incarnation?
Advent is Christ incarnate in the face of the poor one.
Advent is Christ,
who is hungry and cold
homeless and imprisoned
lonely and in despair.
Advent is also Christ...in me.
—lkc

hope

a meditation

by John S. Ballenger



Editor's Note: This and the other three meditations like it (see peace, joy, and love) were originally used as introductions to four evenings of Advent music (abendmusik). They can be used in print, or as calls to worship for Advent Sundays.

It is the first Sunday of Advent. The theme is hope. Hope is the subtle indicator that we look forward in time. But it's not just a matter of looking ahead—looking beyond where we are at present. Hope is also the subtle indicator that in our future there will be more.

More what? Well, that's different for all of us, isn't it? And oh so important for each of us. After all, it is the hopes, the dreams, deep down inside us that focus us—that point in the direction of our becoming, and thus reveal more of us than we perhaps realize. What is it for which you hope? What is your deepest dream?

Advent invites us—no, Advent demands of us, that we examine our hopes—that we become aware of the direction in which we're headed—that we claim, in fact, who we are. What is it for which you hope?

We wrap this time of year in attempts to fulfill hopes. Under Christmas trees will be wide assortments of attempts to meet expectations—dreams. We want to give our loved ones what it

is they want most—but most of us realize that what we want most can't be packaged and placed under a tree with a little card saying who it's from.

There is some sense that our most profound dreams and hopes are the ones we can actually do very little in the way of accomplishing. And oh what a sense of dis-ease that can bring. Here we are, filled with a premonition of what could be—a wild hope—a fierce longing—and a sense of impossibility.

And then a voice cries in the wilderness—into our darkness comes light. Good news. God's news. Ultimately, you see, God is our hope. Ultimately, the sense we have of the potential for more—the sense of a richer, more profound way of being—is our sense of what God can do—of who God can be in our lives.

Advent is the affirmation that God is at work—that God created us with hopes and dreams that can only be met in encounter with the divine. It is time—time to hope—time to celebrate the God who will not only meet our hope, but exceed it to unimaginable extent.

It is the first Sunday of Advent. The theme is hope. God bless you. Amen.

—John Ballenger is a minister in Waco, Texas and has served as the drama and poetry editor for *Seeds of Hope* since 1991.

thoughts on anticipation

by David Tatum

I don't think anyone would say it was easy traveling over dusty, barren land with barely a road to follow. With only your feet or maybe an animal to carry you. But this time it was even harder. On Christmas eve, this young couple was trying to get to Bethlehem and she was about to have a baby. Nine months pregnant and out in the middle of nowhere on a donkey.

Getting to Bethlehem was only

the beginning, there were other problems to face. Once in the city, there was no place to stay and Mary's body was telling her that this baby would not wait much longer. Joseph must have been frantic trying to find a place for him and Mary to rest so that this baby could be born. Finally, with no other choice, Mary and Joseph settled in a stable. Surely this was not the place to bring a new life

into the world. But it happened. This child was born.

Every Christmas Eve I am filled with anticipation for the promise that this child brought with him. A promise that no matter how hectic life gets and no matter what the circumstances, hope will be born and it will change the world.

—David Tatum is a furniture maker in Greensboro, North Carolina.

the waiting begins

a litany for the first week in advent

by Katie Cook

LEADER: And now we begin the waiting. The coming that we anticipate is foretold by the prophets of old:

PEOPLE: "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of Jesse's roots; and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon this chosen one;

LEADER: "And when this happens, the wolf shall lie down with the lamb, and no harm will come to them, and a little child shall lead them all;

PEOPLE: "They shall not hurt anyone nor destroy anything in all of God's Holy Mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of God, as the waters cover the sea."

LEADER: "For unto us a child is born, and unto us a son is given." It is for this coming that we wait.

PEOPLE: Into our darkness a light has shone. We wait to see it shine once more.

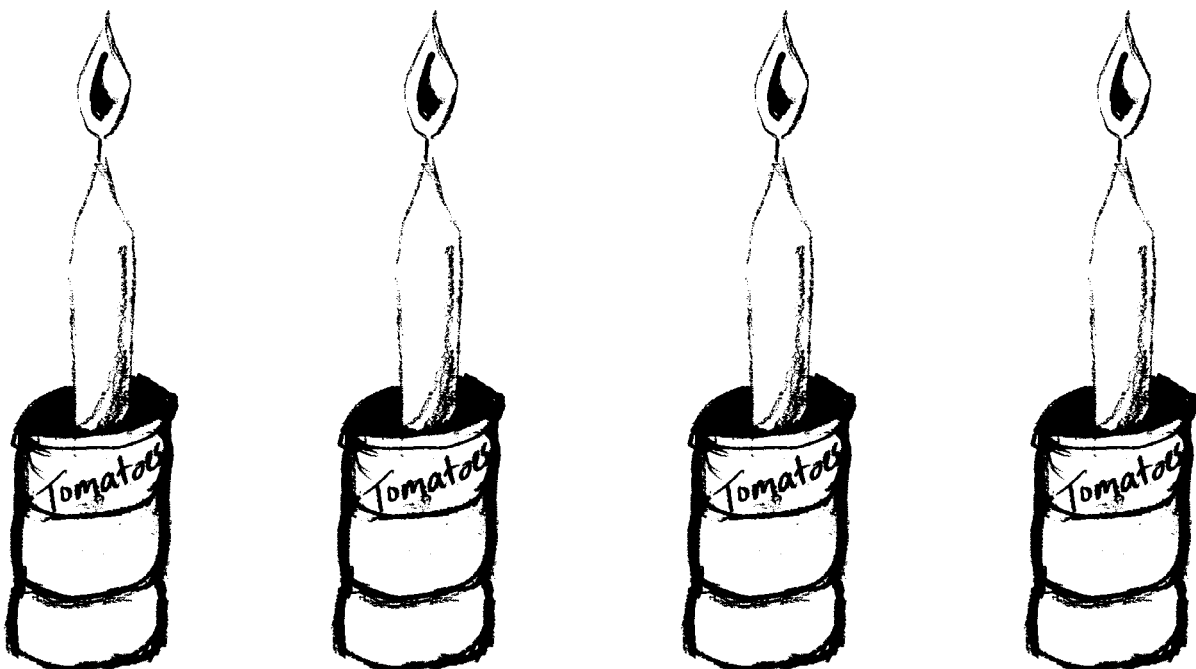
LEADER: Into our hearts a hope is born, that joy will return to our lives, that peace will be restored in all the earth.

PEOPLE: It is for this joy, this hope, this peace that we wait.

LEADER: Advent is a time of waiting, but it is also a time for reaching out beyond ourselves.

PEOPLE: For advent is Christ incarnate in the face of the poor one; advent is Christ in those who are hungry and cold, homeless and imprisoned, lonely and in despair.

ALL: Advent is also Christ...in me.



Lenora Mathis

I am waiting

a meditation

by Brett Younger

Advent begins with darkness. These weeks remind us that we are perpetually hoping for the dawn. Fear, hunger, emptiness, and lostness cover the earth. Those who recognize the darkness are waiting for a light.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti writes;

I am waiting for a rebirth of wonder,

and I am waiting for the Age of Anxiety to drop dead...

I am waiting for the Second Coming

and I am waiting for a religious revival to sweep through the state of Arizona...

I am waiting to get some intimations of immortality by recollecting my early childhood

and I am waiting for the green mornings to come again...

And I am awaiting perpetually and forever a renaissance of wonder.

The poet reminds me that;

I am waiting for the moment when I become the person I keep thinking I should be,
and I am waiting to feel no need for the approval of others.

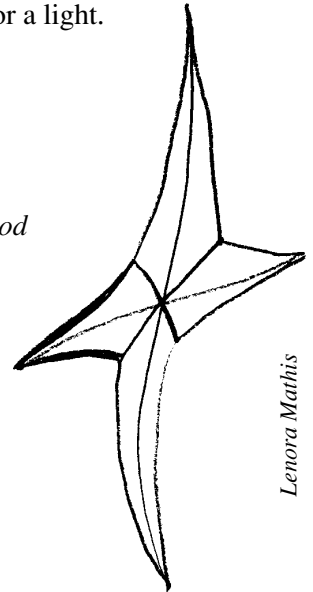
I am waiting to truly want the needy to have what I grudgingly give,
and I am waiting to love other children with the love I have for my own.

I am waiting for the church of Jesus Christ to act like Jesus Christ,
and I am waiting to be the pastor I imagine God thinks I should be.

And I am awaiting perpetually and forever a light that shines in the darkness.

The promise of that for which we wait comes with Christmas. The hope we need is born. The acceptance we desire is given. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it.

—Brett Younger is a pastor in Waco, Texas.



Lenora Mathis

bulletin art

Oh, Majestic One,
whose passion spills
into flesh and blood,
set our hearts on the edge of our seats,
shivering in hope, longing,
longing for the age
when bitter memory
dissolves into magnificat.

—Ken Sehested



peace

a meditation

by John S. Ballenger



It is the second Sunday of Advent. The theme is peace. Peace...imagine all the pieces—the pieces of our fractured society: the rich and the poor, the employed, the unemployed—pieces divided by race and religion and politics—the pieces of our families, divided by geography, by commitments and covenants unable to be kept, by different priorities, different expectations, different goals—the pieces of ourselves that fracture any sense of wholeness and health into doubts and frustrations.

Imagine all those pieces.

It's almost like in college when you contemplated all your professors asked of you, well, demanded of you, and you thought, well, it's easy for them. If all I had to do was concentrate on one subject, I'd be fine. I'd be great. But it's like my Math professor doesn't realize that I have Religion and English to do too.

And then you grow up, and realize there are always too many pieces—too many things to do—too many things you want to do. Too many options. If we could only focus on one

thing. If there only weren't so many pieces. If there weren't so many pieces, there would be peace.

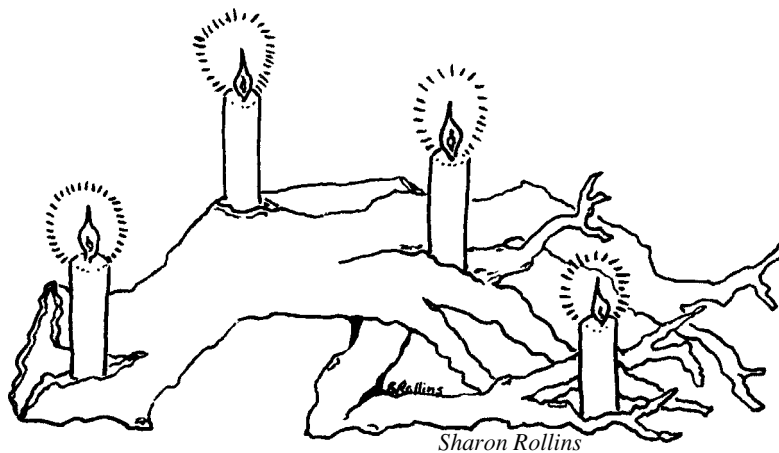
And as God is wont to do, God enters into the frustration and pain of our experience, and doesn't take it away. In fact, God declares that pieces are what it's all about. And, as God is want to do, from within our experience, God declares, let me shed a little light on this for you.

Let's look at this a little differently. It's not about eliminating pieces, but just getting them in the right place—putting them in the right order. Love God. Love your neighbor as yourself. And everything else will fall into place. It's simple. It's not easy, but it's simple. Amidst pieces that have found their place, there will be peace.

God is born, into our experience, the prince of peace, to model for us what to do with our pieces.

It is the second Sunday of Advent. The theme is peace. God bless you. Amen.

—John Ballenger is a minister in Waco, Texas and has served as the drama and poetry editor for *Seeds of Hope* since 1991.



Jesus' peace seems to have meant not the absence of struggle but the presence of love.

—Frederich Buechner, *Wishful Thinking*

bulletin art

a litany for peace Sunday

by Katie Cook

LEADER: This is the week of peace, they say.

PEOPLE: But all around us are wars and rumors of wars.

LEADER: We wish for the nations to join hands in peace.

PEOPLE: But instead we see the countries of the world ravaged by bombs and paralyzed by terrorists; we watch in shock as ethnic purging re-emerges into the international scene; we watch in dismay as whole nations fall before the violence of hunger.

LEADER: We long for peace in the land where we live.

PEOPLE: But we see fear throughout our cities, dogging our steps through the streets; we see unchecked greed in the marketplaces; we watch ethnic groups, political parties, and religious communities fling poisoned barbs of prejudice toward one another; we see the slow slaughter of the poor through the violence of greed and denial.

LEADER: We ache for peace among friends.

PEOPLE: But something within us builds walls to keep the love out; something within us holds us back from the embrace that might heal our brokenness.

LEADER: Most of all, we want peace within our hearts.

PEOPLE: But we rush about in our busyness and never give the peace a chance to plant itself and grow; or we have our hearts so heavily guarded that peace cannot penetrate the fortress.

LEADER: We are told that the child whose coming was foretold was described as the Prince of Peace.

PEOPLE: But we are not sure what that means, and we are confused by the lack of peace around us.

ALL: O Prince of Peace, still our minds and hearts and plant hope where we feel despair. Show us what you meant when you spoke of peace. Show us how to have peace in ourselves, and how to make peace in the world around us. Amen.

Editor's notes: Katie Cook is the editor for Seeds of Hope Publishers. The art below is by eight-year-old Catriona McGlashan Long. It is inspired by Pablo Picasso's Colombe bleu."

bookmark



"Peace on earth" in the angelic message does not simply mean peace later—in heaven after this life is over; it does not mean simply peace with God—deep down inside your own individual soul. It means rather Pax Christi, the peace of Christ that begins here and now with the poor who have long since buried their hopes. This different peace is the peace that leads the shepherds from hopelessness and fear into a "great joy which will come to all people."

—Dorothee Soelle,
Preaching on Peace

Living towards peace

a sermon for Peace Sunday

by Brett Younger
Isaiah 11:1-9



We are the products of our hopes and dreams. We are drawn toward what we think our lives should be. Small dreams are always tempting us, but trivial dreams lead to trivial lives that give only lip service to a trivial God. We can dream of a promotion and a bigger house or we can dream of a better world.

The prophet Isaiah dreamed big. He dreamed of a new day for all creation. Out of Israel, out of the stump, a shoot will emerge, from the roots of a fallen tree fruit will grow. God will come in the Spirit of peace and create a world where the poor are treated with kindness.

Isaiah could have said it in prose rather than poetry, as in: "God's people are having a rough time, but one day God will make it right." But instead the prophet paints this unforgettable picture—wolves and lambs, leopards and goats, calves and lions, all sharing the same pasture, living in peace. God will reorder, rearrange, and heal all of the divisions. Isaiah dreamed of a day so free from fear that a baby will crawl over the cobra's hole and a little child will play in the snakes' den as though it were a doll house.

Isaiah's dream seems unrealistic—to say the least. We read "the wolf will lie down with the lamb" and expect the next line to be, "but the lamb won't get much sleep and will disappear the next day during breakfast."

It's hard to take such an idyllic vision seriously. If Isaiah believes that armies will be dismantled, missile installations turned into grain elevators, and defense budgets cut to feed hungry children, then he must have lived in a heavy fog.

War is considered far more practical than peace. In the absence of war, people like to say they are for peace, but it never lasts. As Coman McCarthy said, "Everybody's a pacifist between wars. It's like being a vegetarian between meals." Politicians too soon start posturing again. They randomly choose places for confrontation. They try to look unyielding, afraid that any sign of concern will be interpreted as weakness. They promise not to negotiate as though listening could be a mistake.

They talk about national pride as if pride is a good enough reason for a war. They point fingers like children on the playground: "It's your fault." "No, it's your fault." They argue, "We're running out of time" without recognizing that makes no sense. Very few politicians work for peace. The tide moves in the other direction. Every time a president declares war his popularity skyrockets. Violence is far more popular than peace.

Our local paper ran a story entitled "War Games Fever" about a local paintball outlet where players dress up in camouflage and shoot one another. Eight- and nine-year-olds are quoted saying, "The best part is shooting people." An adult

explains, "Nothing is more exciting than shooting another person."

One favorite game is called "Killing the president." The line that bothered me the most was when the owner suggested that shooting one another is an ideal outing for church groups. Do church people really do that? That ought to disturb us, but not many eyebrows are raised.

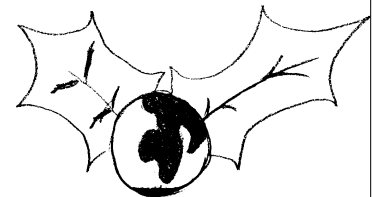
John Kennedy said, "We'll keep having wars until the conscientious objector enjoys the same prestige as the warrior." The warriors get more applause than the peacemakers.

The ignored truth is that war is unreasonable. When the first atomic bomb was dropped on Japan, President Truman was on board a Navy ship, returning from a conference of the Allies. Someone handed him a note that informed him of the successful drop of the bomb. He turned to a group of soldiers and said, "This is the greatest news in the history of the world." Down through the ages lots of world leaders have believed that they were changing the course of the world, when they were only taking their place in the long processional of violence and death.

The world's long history of waging war makes it clear that war doesn't work. The people who believe in war are being unreasonable. Every generation since Isaiah has been told a strong military is the best guarantee of peace, so they have built spears and swords and missiles and warheads. Has it worked? During the last 3,350 years, the world has seen about 227 years of peace.

In the last four hundred years there have been more than 8,000 peace treaties—all intended to last forever. They last, according to historian J.T. Ford, an average of two years. "If there's anything we learn from history, it's that we learn nothing from history," Benjamin Mays said. There is no war to end all wars.

"Christians should grieve with everyone who grieves and stand with all who work for peace. So you and I, in our small but crucial way, should give ourselves to peace at every level. Maybe we accept war on an international scale because we know we're capable of similar foolishness on an individual scale."



Lenora Mathis

General Dwight Eisenhower once told his troops, "Don't needlessly endanger your lives until I give you the signal." People keep dying needlessly. During the U.S. Gulf War a senior Pentagon official was asked why the military censored footage showing Iraqi soldiers being sliced in two by helicopter gunfire. He responded, "If we let people see that kind of thing, there

would never be any more wars.” As Benjamin Franklin would say, “There’s never been a good war or a bad peace.”

And yet we keep spending our money on weapons that will never do what they promise. We pay more and more taxes. Our military gets stronger. We fight war after war—five in this country, in this century. In the name of peace nations build nuclear warheads—each of them more destructive than the bomb that devastated Hiroshima. Our country has more than enough weapons to destroy the whole world. Yet we keep building bombs.

According to the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, our country’s military budget is five times that of Japan, the next largest power, ten times that of Russia, seventeen times the combined budgets of the nations identified by the U.S. Pentagon as potential adversaries, more than the combined military budgets for all other nations, and—maybe most surprisingly—more than the Pentagon asks for.

It doesn’t take a prophet to see that building more bombs makes the world more dangerous. It may be that the probability of war increases with the effectiveness of our weapons.

The stakes have never been higher. In the eighth century BCE soldiers died just as dead as they do now. Parents’ tears ran just as bitterly. The cries of the wounded were just as agonizing. Politicians depended on spears and swords then just as they depend on missiles and warships today.

Still, the stakes are higher now. We try to forget that we still live under the shadow of a mushroom cloud. Thomas Merton wrote this about our addiction to war: “The human race today is like an alcoholic who knows that drinking will destroy him and yet always has good reasons why he must continue to drink.”

We have unthinkable power to destroy. Our weapons are unbelievably destructive. So who is more realistic, those who believe in war or those who believe in peace? People of good will have different ideas about how to achieve peace, so sometimes we’re reticent to talk about it. We should be able to agree, however, on our abhorrence of war and our need to work together for peace.

Jesus’ blessing of the peacemakers—those who live for the day Isaiah dreamed—is central to the Gospel. Jesus said something like, “You have heard it said ‘Love your country and hate its enemies,’ but I say to you ‘Love Saddam Hussein and pray for the Iraqis.’”

Christians should grieve with everyone who grieves and stand with all who work for peace. So you and I, in our small but crucial way, should give ourselves to peace at every level. Maybe we accept war on an international scale because we know we’re capable of similar foolishness on an individual scale.

We should stop misdirecting our anger to bolster our own self-esteem; stop criticizing long enough to offer words of reconciliation; be more willing to extend forgiveness and less willing to think the worst of others. We should love our enemies and pray that they will live long, good lives, beat our own swords into plowshares and our own spears into pruning hooks, and no longer wage war with our neighbor across the street or across the ocean.

We have to push for peace, because there are no statistics

that apply to Christians—only sisters and brothers. In his book *Christianity Rediscovered*, Vincent Donovan tells of being a missionary with the Masai people in Kenya. One of the most significant gestures for the Masai is to offer one another a handful of grass as a sign of peace.

“We’ll see that the invisible boundary lines that divide us were only in our minds, and that those we’ve called our enemies are also God’s children. One day nations won’t wage war any more.”



When arguments arise, one Masai will hold out a tuft of grass. If the other accepts it, it’s the assurance that no violence will erupt because of the argument. Donovan says, “No Masai would violate that sacred sign of peace, because it’s not only a sign of peace; it is peace.” Shouldn’t Christians be able to say “The peace of Christ be with you” and see it as a promise that we won’t kill one another? Have you ever stopped to think that if Christians just refused to kill other Christians, most wars would never begin? Peace can become something we wish for, something we make, something we do, something we give and something for which we live.

We live towards God’s hope. God’s promise is not that there will be worldwide peace in our time. The hope is for the extravagant gift of God’s peace.

George Lansbury worked hard for peace in England. He lived through World War I and died just after World War II. To most it would seem that he had struggled for forty years for nothing. Just before Lansbury died, a friend asked him how much nearer he thought peace was after his forty years of peacemaking. Lansbury answered, “Forty years nearer.”

One day all of those in charge of the old world—the generals, politicians, and priests who profit from the present order—are going to be displaced and God will rule. One day you’ll look at the parent you never understood and understand. Even more miraculously, they’ll look at us and understand. Palestinians and Israelis, Serbs and Moslems, Tutsies and Hutus, Catholics and Protestants, Chinese and Tibetans, liberals and conservatives, rich and poor, black and white, male and female, old and young will celebrate God’s grace together. One day the church will be completely sold out to God’s vision of peace.

We’ll see that the invisible boundary lines that divide us were only in our minds, and that those we’ve called our enemies are also God’s children. One day nations won’t wage war any more.

Advent is an opportunity to catch a glimpse of the vision. God’s peace is what all our singing and praying and worshipping are about if they’re about anything that matters. Our hope is the Prince of Peace. Christmas is the invasion of this utterly implausible vision—a gentleness from on high so tender as to be born in a little child. So we can do more than think that peace is a good idea. We can live in the Spirit of Peace.

—Brett Younger is a pastor in Waco, Texas. He says that this has not been one of his more popular sermons.

bulletin art



**By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light
to those who sit in
darkness and in the
shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way
of peace.**

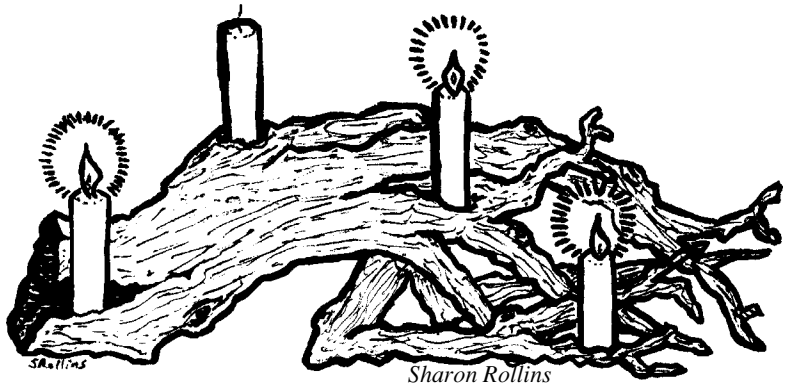
Luke 1:78-79 (NRSV)

René Boldt

joy

a meditation

by John S. Ballenger



It is the third Sunday of Advent. The theme is joy. Joy. According to the dictionary:

1 joy n [ME, fr. OF joie, fr L gaudia, pl. of gaudium, fr. gaudere to rejoice, akin to Gk gethein to rejoice]
1 a : the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires : DELIGHT b : the expression or exhibition of such emotion : GAIETY 2 : a state of happiness or felicity : BLISS 3 : a source or cause of delight

2 joy vi to experience great pleasure or delight : REJOICE ~ vt 1 archaic : GLADDEN 2 archaic : ENJOY

This is fairly clear. Locate joy on the extreme of that side of the emotional scale you deem positive, and let it be an extreme

case of feeling good and happy. Smiley faces and exclamation points. As inconsistent and temporary as any emotion. Dependent on the usual variety of contextual circumstances: is the sun out? Do you possess what you desire? Are you successful? Aren't you glad? What joy!

Then there's that choir of angels, that multitude of heavenly hosts, blazing forth in light and sound, God's: "I bring you good tidings of great joy."

And it would seem to necessarily entail somewhat more than feeling good and being glad—especially when we know more of the story—when we know more of the details through which the joy is delivered—through which the joy is made flesh—when we have a little more of the perspective God presumably had when the angels were sent to proclaim the advent of joy—a clear perspective into the details of misunderstanding and rejection—the deep pain of betrayal—physical torture and death—good tidings of great joy. Alleluia.

So it is thus within the context of our own experience of

the shadows of life (our own experience of death and betrayal, rejection and misunderstanding) that with excitement, we begin to suspect that God is redefining again—seeking to provide a consistency for us—a joy not rooted in circumstance—a joy not dependent—a joy beyond our definitions and beyond our understandings.

It is the third Sunday of Advent. The theme is joy. God bless you. Amen.

—John Ballenger is a minister in Waco, Texas and has served as the drama and poetry editor for *Seeds of Hope* since 1991.



Mike Massingale

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 word,
and trusted it to people
too young and poor to be spoiled...
—Dan Bagby

a quest for joy

a meditation

by Katie Cook

I was on a retreat during early advent. We were supposed to be meditating about joy, but I was stymied somehow. I wrote in my journal, "What is joy, anyway? Have I ever really known joy? How do I know what it is when I experience it? Is it something you look for?" I sat in my room in the profound silence.

The almost summery sound of night creatures greeted me as I emerged from my room, afraid I might miss the sunset. (They are glorious in Central Texas in the winter.)

In their song I heard these words:

Be at peace. It is twilight, our time, and we want to sing and chirp and croak as the sky burns away. Come, listen to us and watch the wind and sky. Our purpose and delight is to sing in our various ways as the evening tires.

The trees performed an intricate dance in the wind. The junipers nimbly wove in and out of the stark oak branches, saying,

Come, join the dance! Our music is the wind and the song of small creatures, which you must be silent to hear. Our joy is to stand in the sun and rain, and to dance in the wind.

The wind romped through the woods and past the buildings, whipping the trees and scattering the brown leaves in the air, saying

Come, feel my presence! I bring changes to the weather. I rattle the windows and doors. I make the trees dance. Feel my movement, and be thankful for fresh winds and rain and storms and cold fronts. Be thankful for the playful caress on your face and through your hair. It is my purpose and my delight simply to blow.

Beyond the naked oak fingers, the dark blue of the sky turned to an advent pastel. The horizon burned with hot orange and a blush of pink. The trailing wisps of cloud above caught the pastel shades. The colors shouted behind the black silhouettes of winter-bare branches, saying,

Come, burn with us! Our last slow goodbye to the day will soon make way for the dance of the stars. Come, drink in the colors! Our joy is to burn up the sky with glory.

The rain drops fell as I sat, watching and listening. Quietly pattering, they fell around me and on me, spotting my glasses, saying,

We fall onto the earth to moisten the dry ground and to nourish growing things. We can fall gently, or we can rage down in daunting sheets of water. We can patter on your roof, or fill the streams to swelling point, covering the roads, flooding the houses. Our voice is sometimes still

and small, and it is sometimes thunderous. It is our delight and our purpose simply to fall upon the earth.

Back inside the lodge, a fire was roaring in the chimney, as if to say

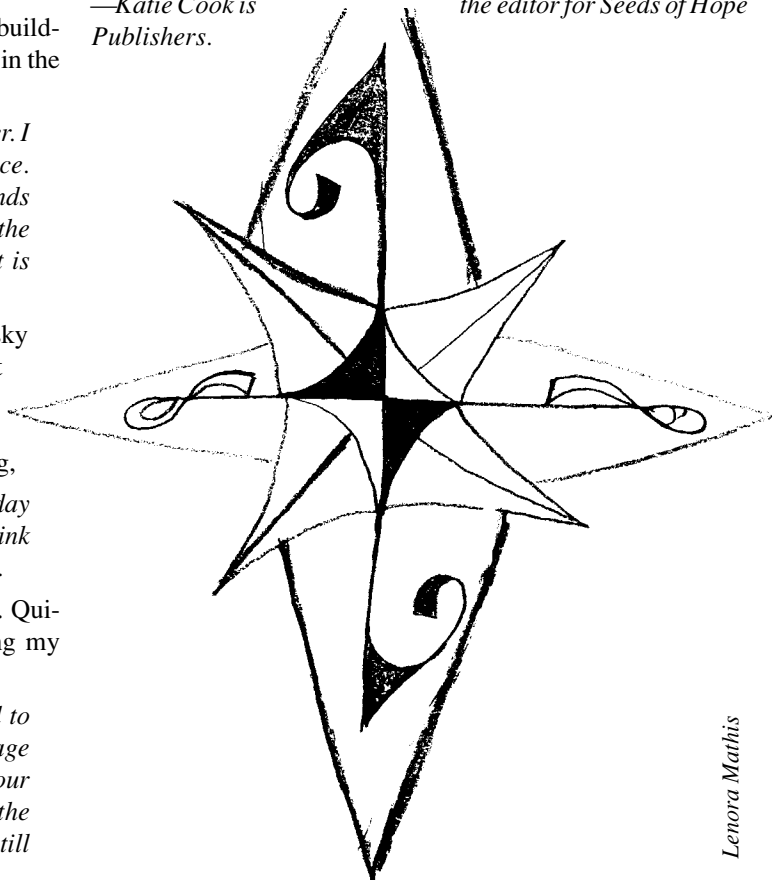
Look at my colors, watch my ever-moving tongues. I consume the sweet wood and then vanish. It is my delight to murmur and chatter and crackle noisily while sending up my flames like prayers.

As I listened to the fire, a footnote in the Jerusalem Bible caught my attention. There I read that the vocation of the human race is to be the children of God.

"So that is where joy comes from," I thought. "That is what joy is about."

My purpose and my delight is simply to be a child of God. When my steps come closer to that place where I am what I was created to be, when my struggles and strivings turn into the simple and natural song that I heard from other creatures that day, when I begin to know who I am as they know who they are, then I will encounter and experience that elusive emotion we call joy.

—Katie Cook is the editor for *Seeds of Hope Publishers.*

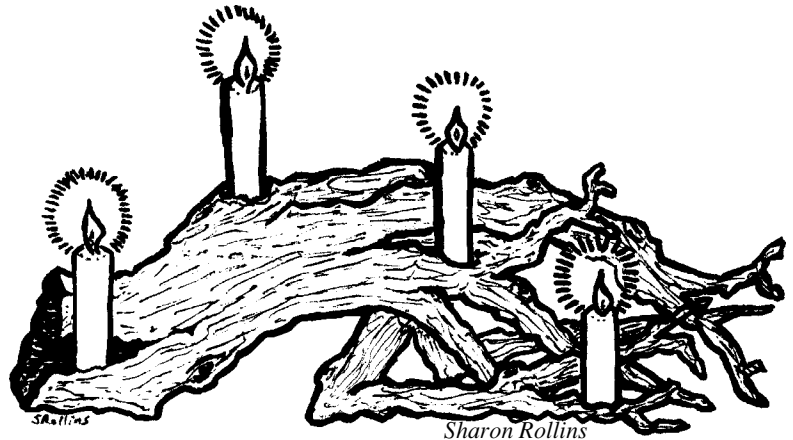


Lenora Mathis

Love

a meditation

by John S. Ballenger



It is the fourth Sunday of Advent. The theme is love. Love is a superlative—however it's used. C'm'on, let's go see this movie, you'll love it! Have you seen my new truck? I love it! Don't you just love ice cream? It doesn't get any better than this. Love is a level and a category unto itself—all its own.

Two things of which to take note, given this uniqueness. One is the potential for abuse. You see, we cheapen the concept regularly. When I think about it, or, if I think about it, love is not what I feel for ice cream, or a movie, or any thing. When I think about it, love is appropriately applied to the most significant of relationships—the deepest, richest, most intimate. To speak of love with integrity is to speak of the way we live, and how we live more abundantly. Which brings us to the second point which is related to the first, being an inverse of it.

Love can be rather intimidating. When you start talking in terms of the most significant, the deepest, richest, most intimate—you're getting into some scary dimensions of relating. There's a vulnerability involved (a trust—an interdependence you choose—a commitment. It's a risk, a big

risk, and what you're risking is yourself. It's a gamble, and the stakes don't get any higher.

Is it worth it? Most of us would say "yes, but for God's sake, let's be careful out there." But it's not for God's sake. It's for our sake that into these responses to love, rises the Star of Bethlehem. The Advent of Jesus is the astounding claim that love is the only way to relate—to anyone. The Advent of Jesus is God's emphatic reaffirmation that love is the way God chooses to relate to each of us. The Advent of Jesus is God risking self—becoming vulnerable, trusting us to prove a commitment—to assert that it's sometimes better to risk and lose than not to risk and never catch a glimpse into the heart of it all—even into the heart of God, which has been broken, but which pulses with the love that creates and sustains and redeems—the love that is the risk, the investment of the self that makes our living worthwhile.

It is the fourth Sunday of Advent. The theme is love. God bless you. Amen.

—John Ballenger is a minister in Waco, Texas and has served as the drama and poetry editor for *Seeds of Hope* since 1991.

bookmark



A Christmas Blessing

by Skip Londos

May you experience joy, beauty
and love

Now, tomorrow and always,
For such is your spiritual birthright.

May you know their Source —

The flowing stream of radiant Light

Which has no beginning and no end

That lives deep within you and
every-One.

—Skip Londos is an investment
broker in Waco, Texas.

Looking for the miracle

a litany for the fourth Sunday in Advent

by Katie Cook

LEADER: The time of the birth of Christ was a time when the powers of light reached out to push back the powers of darkness. It was a time of miracle...

PEOPLE: It was a time of incarnation, the divine in our midst, the eternal Word made flesh—the most baffling and loving, scandalous and generous event in the history of our world.

LEADER: But have we found the miracle in Advent here and now, in our own lives? Or is it just a story we read every year?

PEOPLE: Sometimes we go through the motions, feeling numb with fatigue and stress. We think our families and our lives should conform to a Hollywood image, and we worry because our families are human, with human frailties. We think we should feel a happy and festive way, but sometimes we don't feel anything. What is wrong?

LEADER: Sometimes we find joy in the steeple bells, in candles and carols and nativity scenes. Sometimes we find it in the lights that neighbors display for the cheer of the beholder, or in a child's first Christmas. Sometimes we find it in reading *A Christmas Carol* for the forty-ninth time.

PEOPLE: But sometimes all these things are marred by headaches and tired feet, by aching hearts, by empty pocketbooks and lonely apartments.

LEADER: Perhaps we are misguided in what we expect from Christmas. Are we looking for the gifts under the tree, the gifts of the world? Or do we look to the one gift, the miracle child?

PEOPLE: But how do we look to the miracle child? Where do we look, and what does that mean?

LEADER: Most often we find the child where we least expect him: in the dirty, unruly children of the poor, outside the realm of polite society. Most often we find him in the faces of people our world has cast aside, the people among whom he was born.

PEOPLE: We can find the stable by looking in the haunts of hopelessness, by looking into the face of the homeless child, the crack baby, and by giving them what we would give to Christ.

LEADER: Then we will know the greatest of all miracles, the Word become flesh in our lives.

ALL: May it be so, for all of us.



feeling like an ant

a confession for Christmastide

by John Christopher Garland

Editor's note: John Garland, a first-year student at Baylor University, went early this fall to hear the well-known Tony Campolo speak in the university's chapel. Campolo told a story that is familiar to his admirers. It is the story of his first visit to Haiti, and of the mother who followed him to the very door of the airplane on which he would return to the U.S., to safety, to comfort and food security. She begged him to take her child with him, pleading that this would be the only way the child would survive. Campolo describes this as the event that spurred him into the world of hunger activism. John went to his dorm room and wrote the following response.

The air was hot and I breathed it, feeling like an ant. Dust swarmed the airfield, stirred by a breeze coming from beyond the trees. The breeze was dead and hot too. A monotone orchestra performed my score—a performance even as oppressive as the sun's-buzzing, clicking, and wailing their ghostly insect song. I sat there, baked with dust and sweat, and waited for my plane to come and carry me away.

I can't remember where the woman came from. She was there. Her voice was broken and trembling, but it was powerful. It was powerful like a child's voice is powerful. And her child was with her, in her arms, nearly dead. There was no power in that child. All of the power was in her voice. I could only hear that broken and trembling voice, above all the orchestra and the dusty heat, and I was afraid. Her child was in her arms as she walked toward me, barefoot in the dust, and his stomach was much larger than it ought to have been. His stomach was grotesquely large, and his eyes were quiet and distant. The child's eyes were dry, but his stomach was splattered with his mother's tears. "Take my baby," she said to me, "take my baby."

The air was hot and I breathed it, feeling like an ant. The insects hummed the same song they hummed when I was a boy, painting houses back in Georgia. I was barefoot too, then, but my stomach was as it ought to have been. I wasn't hungry when I was a boy. Now, as a young man, I saw a hungry boy whose eyes were dry and

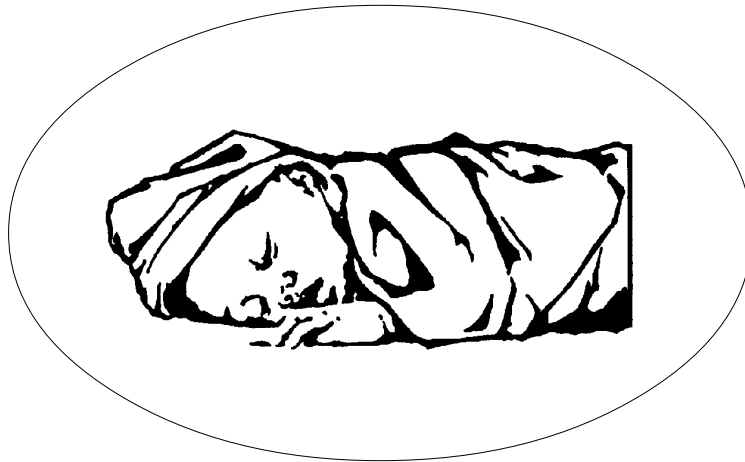
whose stomach was wet with the tears of his mother. I was desperate and afraid because the plane wasn't there. The horizon was empty and dead; the woman's voice was loud and trembling. "Take my baby," she said. I could not look at her. My power was gone; I was choking on the heat. All the power was in her voice. "Take my baby."

Then the airplane was there. It came over the trees and dropped onto the field in a whirl of engines and dust. I was running toward it, baked in dust and sweat; I was running toward my escape. But the woman was running behind me, her child in her arms, nearly dead. That voice pursued me, running faster than my dry legs could. I crumbled into the plane, yelling

at the pilot. I needed to leave; the heat was choking me.

The plane did not take off soon enough. The woman put her hand on the window, and her hand trembled. "Take my baby! Take my baby!" Her tears dropped helplessly onto her sweet child's stomach. His eyes were distant and dry. I watched the woman running after the plane as it slid down the runway. The plane lifted into the air and the hum of insects was replaced by the hum of engines sucking dark oil.

I sat in that cool compartment, looking out across a vast horizon, and I breathed. But my thoughts were disturbing invaders. They were unnerving; "Take my baby," they said. Then I realized who that baby was, and my heart began to bleed within me. ■



bring your hands together

an advent meditation in lessons and carols for nine voices,
instrumentalists, soloists and choir in three acts
for Christmas Eve

by John S. Ballenger

Author's note: You may wish—and should feel free—to use different Scripture references or make different musical selections. The important thing to do is to find Christmas Scripture and hymnody that affirm the mystery and the wonder of our faith. Be sure to maintain the tension of paradox included in so much of that Scripture and so many of those hymns. Inasmuch as you can, alternate instrumental accompaniment—piano, organ, flute, violin, oboe, guitar, etc. Alternate soloists, choral interpretations and congregational singing as well.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome and Invocation

Sisters and brothers,
Christmas is at hand,
and we gather to share with one another
the experience of this high and holy time.
Welcome.

In a time so easy to simply enjoy,
may we help each other walk with integrity
through a time that not only commemorates,
but also realizes God's initiative—
God's inbreaking into our world.

God—
open our eyes and ears and hearts
to see the truth of Immanuel— God with us—
in the words, songs and meditations of our worship,
and in the day-to-day experiences of our living.
This we pray in Jesus' name,
amen.

Act I.

The choir enters in silence and takes its place. The instrumentalists take their places. Three people enter and take their places: voice 1, DSL; voice 2 DSC and voice 3, DSR. Voices 1 and 3 should be of the opposite sex. All three persons should be miked. All three can be behind pulpits, or just the person in the middle. Once started, there should be no blank space. As soon as one part concludes, the next begins.

SCENE I.

voice 1 raising left hand
On the one hand,
we affirm with Scripture
that the Word was made flesh.

voice 2
In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and

family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

This from the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke, verses one through seventeen.

voice 1— with a note of vindication now
On the one hand,
the Word was made flesh—
past tense.
It happened lo these many years ago.

solo
"Once in Royal David's City" (#161 in "The Worshipping Church," vs. 1)
Once in royal David's city stood a lowly cattle shed,
where a mother laid her baby in a manger for his bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little child.

voice 1
We look back to God's work in history—
we look back to God's appearance in history—
with gratitude and joy and wonder.
The God of space and time—
the God who created all that is—
the God in whom all power rests—
was born a baby— became a child.
The Word was made flesh.
Thanks be to God.

choir
"Gentle Mary Laid Her Child" (#156 in "The Worshipping Church," vs. 2)
Angels sang about his birth; Wise Men sought and found him;
heaven's star shone brightly forth, glory all around him:
Shepherds saw the wondrous sight, heard the angels singing;
all the plains were lit that night, all the hills were ringing.

voice 1
So, because this all happened—
in history,

because God is more than just the beginning of history—
because God is actively a part of history—
we testify in word and song.

It is our witness.

It is the story we tell.

congregational hymn

“It Came upon the Midnight Clear” (#170 in “The Worshiping Church,” vs. 1)

It came upon the midnight clear, that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth to touch their harps of gold:
“Peace on the earth, good-will to all, from heaven’s all gracious
King”:

the world in solemn stillness lay to hear the angels sing.

SCENE II.

voice 3 raising left hand

Alright, so all that past stuff was all on the one hand.

Now, on the other hand,—lowering left hand and raising right
hand)

it is advent,

and we look ahead to the birth which is not yet but which will
be.

voice 2

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly
to Jerusalem,

and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is
paid, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all
her sins. A voice cries out: “In the wilderness prepare the way of
the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be
made low;

the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a
plain. Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all
people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has
spoken.”

This from the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, verses one through five.

voice 3

We look ahead with longing
to the future fulfillment of the promises of God.

We look ahead not just with longing though,
but with a deep sense of trust.

solo—acapella

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (#133 in “The Worshiping
Church,” vs. 1)

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel!

voice 3

There is a future that is not yet—
something toward which time has been purposefully moving
since time began.

It is in God’s hands.

Thanks be to God.

choir

“Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus” (#135 in “The Worshiping
Church,” vs. 1)

Come, thou long-expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us;
let us find our rest in thee.

Israel’s strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear Desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

voice 3

And because this is all yet to be—
because God is not finished yet—
because the story is still being written—
we anticipate.

It is our hope.

It is our prayer.

congregational hymn

“It Came upon the Midnight Clear” (#170 in “The Worshiping
Church,” vs. 3)

For lo, the days are hastening on, by prophets seen of old,
when, with the ever-circling years, shall come the time foretold,
when peace shall over all the earth its ancient splendors fling,
and all the world give back the song which now the angels sing.

SCENE III.

voices 1 and 3 raising both left and right hands and bringing
them down and together as if in prayer

voice 1

Bring the hands together

voices 1 and 3

in Christmas prayer,

voice 3

and we look ahead to what has already been.

voice 2

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have
heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at
and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this
life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and
declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was
revealed to us— we declare to you what we have seen and heard
so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our
fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We
are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.
This from the first chapter of First John, verses one through
four.

See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay
according to everyone’s work. I am the Alpha and the Omega,
the first and the last, the beginning and the end. . . . It is I, Jesus
. . . the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning
star.

This from the twenty-second chapter of Revelation, verses
twelve, thirteen and parts of sixteen.

voice 3

Bring the hands together

voices 1 and 3

in Christmas prayer,

voice 1

and we are called now to attend a birth two thousand years ago.

choir

“O Come, All Ye Faithful” (#173 in “The Worshiping Church,”

vs. 1)

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem!
Come and behold him, born the King of angels;
O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

voice 1

Bring the hands together

voices 1 and 3

in Christmas prayer,

voice 3

and we celebrate a present eternal.

voice 1

We look back and we look ahead

and we experience this night—

voice 3

this night of long ago—

this night yet to be—

voices 1 and 3

this night tonight.

congregational hymn

“Silent Night! Holy Night! (#164 in “The Worshiping Church,”
vs. 1 & 3)

Silent night! holy night! All is calm, all is bright

‘round yon virgin mother and child,

holy infant so tender and mild, sleep in heavenly peace,

sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night! holy night! Son of God, love’s pure light,

radiant beams from thy holy face,

with the dawn of redeeming grace,

Jesus, Lord, at thy birth, Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

Act II.

three people—different from the first three) enter and take their
places: voice 1, DSL; voice 2 DSC and voice 3, DSR. voices 1
and 3 should be of the opposite sex. all three persons should be
miked. all three can be behind pulpits, or just the person in the
middle.

SCENE I.

voice 1b

On the one hand,

it is part of our faith affirmation—

integral to our theology and Scripture:

the Word was with God and the Word was God.

and here, any focus on past tense quickly fades

in comparison to the amazing affirmation being made:

the Word was God.

voice 2b

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No
one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me,
you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him
and have seen him.”

This from the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of John, verses
six and seven.

voice 1b

To see Jesus is to see God.

The Word is with God and the Word is God.

The incarnation is God’s gracious initiative—

God’s ultimate investment in God’s own creation.

choir

“Once in Royal David’s City” (#161 in “The Worshiping
Church,” vs. 2)

He came down to earth from heaven

who is God and Lord of all,

and his shelter was a stable,

and his cradle was a stall:

with the poor and meek and lowly

lived on earth, our Savior holy.

voice 1b

There is an incomprehensible otherness to Jesus—

a dimension to his being we can’t even imagine.

And there needs to be an appropriate awe—

even an appropriate fear—

at that which is so immeasurably far beyond us.

choir

“Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence” (#167 in “The Worshiping
Church,” vs. 1)

Let all mortal flesh keep silence,

and with fear and trembling stand;

ponder nothing earthly-minded,

for with blessing in his hand

Christ our God to earth descendeth,

our full homage to demand.

voice 1b

Behold the glory of God!

solo

Infant Holy, Infant Lowly (#169 in “The Worshiping Church,”
vs. 1)

Infant holy, infant lowly,

for his bed a cattle stall;

oxen lowing, little knowing

Christ the babe is Lord of all.

Swift are winging angels singing,

noels ringing, tidings bringing:

Christ the babe is Lord of all.

voice 1b

The incarnation is the glory of God that the angels sing.

It is the power of God at work in the miracles.

It is the wisdom of God informing the parables.

It is the truth of God in the sayings of Jesus.

It is the love of God in the relationships Jesus makes.

It is the justice of God in the teaching of Jesus.

It is the transcendence of God even in human form.

Immanuel is “God with us.”

Thanks be to God.

congregational hymn

“Angels from the Realms of Glory” (#174 in “The Worshiping
Church,” vs. 1 & 2)

Angels from the realms of glory,

wing your flight o’er all the earth;

ye who sang creation’s story,

now proclaim Messiah’s birth:

Come and worship, come and worship,

worship Christ, the newborn King.

Shepherds in the fields abiding,

watching o'er your flocks by night,
God with us is now residing,
yonder shines the infant Light:
Come and worship, come and worship,
worship Christ, the newborn King.

SCENE II.

voice 3b

Alright, so on the one hand,
Jesus is God.

On the other hand,
it is equally part of our faith affirmation—
just as integral to our theology and Scripture:
the Word was made flesh.

voice 2b

For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root
out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should
look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire
him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering
and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others
hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account.
Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet
we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our
iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
and by his bruises we are healed.
This from the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, verses two through
five.

voice 3b

Jesus was one of us.

Born to Mary as we were born to our mothers.
Exhausted from the process of being born,
like all newborn babies— like all of us did—
he spent a lot of his first hours asleep,
carefully and proudly watched over by Mary and Joseph.

children's choir

"Away in a Manger" (#147 in "The Worshiping Church," vs. 1)
Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head;
the stars in the sky looked down where he lay,
the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

voice 3b

Jesus was one of us.

Jesus experienced life like we do.
Jesus knew what it was like to feel lonely—
and to spend time with close friends.
He knew what it was like to feel betrayed—
and to feel affirmed.
He knew what it meant to be hungry—
and to enjoy feasting at a party.
He laughed and he cried.
Jesus experienced life at its fullest— its richest and deepest.

choir

"Once in Royal David's City" (#161 in "The Worshiping
Church," vs. 3)
Jesus is our childhood pattern,
day by day like us he grew,
he was little, weak, and helpless,
tears and smiles like us he knew:

and he feels for all our sadness,
and he shares in all our gladness.

voice 3b

The incarnation is the glory of God wrapped in swaddling
clothes and laid in a manger.

It is the power of God made vulnerable.

It is the wisdom of God shared at the dinner table over bread
and wine.

It is the truth of God pointed out in flowers and sheep.

It is the love of God in hugs and touch.

It is the justice of God in relationships with the unclean and the
despised.

It is the immanence of God even in human form.

Immanuel is "God with us."

Thanks be to God.

congregational hymn

"O Come, All Ye Faithful" (#173 in "The Worshiping Church,"
vs. 4)

Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning,
Jesus, to thee be all glory given;
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing;
O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

SCENE III.

voice 1b

Bring the hands together

voices 1b and 3b

in Christmas prayer

voice 3b

to praise the one who is both fully human and wholly divine.

voice 2b

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who,
though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with
God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking
the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being
found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient
to the point of death— even death on a cross. Therefore God also
highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every
name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in
heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue
should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the
Father.

This from the second chapter of Philippians, verses five through
eleven.

voice 3b

Bring the hands together

voices 1b and 3b

in Christmas prayer

voice 1b

to acknowledge the profound mystery of our faith.

choir

"Hark! the Herald Angels Sing" (#171 in "The Worshiping
Church," vs. 2)

Christ, by highest heaven adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord,
late in time behold him come, offspring of the Virgin's womb:
veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail th'incarnate Deity,
pleased as man with us to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.
Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the new-born King."

voice 1b
It is the distinctive of our faith.

voice 3b
Fully human and fully God.
One with our experience

voice 1b
yet also beyond it.
Creator—

voice 3b
who is yet part of creation.
voices 1b and 3b
Thanks be to God.

congregational hymn
“Angels We Have Heard on High” (#152 in “The Worshiping Church,” vs. 3 & 4)

Come to Bethlehem and see
him whose birth the angels sing;
come, adore on bended knee
Christ the Lord, the newborn King.

Gloria in excelsis Deo,
Gloria in excelsis Deo.

See within a manger laid
Jesus, Lord of heaven and earth!
Mary, Joseph, lend your aid,
sing with us our Savior’s birth.
Gloria in excelsis Deo,
Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Act III.

three people—different from the first and second three) enter and take their places: voice 1, DSL; voice 2 DSC and voice 3, DSR. voices 1 and 3 should be of the opposite sex. all three persons should be miked. all three can be behind pulpits, or just the person in the middle.

SCENE I.

voice 1c
On the one hand,
Jesus was unique.
And Jesus’ mission was unique.
After all, who else is human and divine?
Around whom else do time past and time future coalesce?

voice 2c
He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.
This from the first chapter of Colossians, verses fifteen through twenty.

choir
“O Come, All Ye Faithful” (#173 in “The Worshiping Church,” vs. 2)
True God of true God, Light from Light eternal,

lo, he shuns not the virgin’s womb;
Son of the Father, begotten, not created;
O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

SCENE II.

voice 3c
On the other hand,
we are the body of Jesus.
We are to be about the business of Jesus’ work.
We have been charged with accomplishing Jesus’ task.

voice 2c
Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also. This from the fourth chapter of First John, verses seven through twelve, and twenty and twenty-one.

“Once in Royal David’s City” (#161 in “The Worshiping Church,” vs. 4)

And our eyes at last shall see him,
through his own redeeming love;
for that child, so dear and gentle,
is our Lord in heaven above,
and he leads his children on
to the place where he has gone.

SCENE III.

voices 1c
Bring the hands together
voices 1c and 3c
in Christmas prayer
voice 3c
with thanksgiving for the responsibility and the privilege—
voice 1c
for showing us how and then sending us off.

voice 2c
For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.
This from the twelfth chapter of Second Corinthians, verses twelve through fourteen and twenty-seven.

children’s choir
“Away in a Manger” (#147 in “The Worshiping Church,” vs. 3)
Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask thee to stay

close by me forever, and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care,
and fit us for heaven to live with thee there.

voices 3c

Bring the hands together

voices 1c and 3c

in Christmas prayer

voice 1c

and “fit us for heaven”—

making of this time and place

a preparation—

voice 3c

an intimation—

a peek into something more.

choir

“O Little Town of Bethlehem” (#154 in “The Worshipping Church,” vs. 3 & 4)

How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given;

so God imparts to human hearts, the blessings of his heaven!

No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin,

where meek souls will receive him still the dear Christ enters in.

O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;

cast out our sin, and enter in; be born in us today.

We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;

O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel.

voice 3c

There can be no greater cause for celebration—

voice 1c

no more urgent news—

no more pressing joy.

congregational hymn

“Joy to the World! the Lord is Come”

(#146 in “The Worshipping Church,”

vs. 1-4)

Joy to the world! the Lord is come;

let earth receive her King;

let every heart prepare him room,

and heaven and nature sing,

and heaven and nature sing,

and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.



Joy to the earth! the Savior reigns;

let all their songs employ;

while fields and floods,

rocks, hills, and plains

repeat the sounding joy,

repeat the sounding joy,

repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,

nor thorns infest the ground;

he comes to make his blessings flow

far as the curse is found,

far as the curse is found,

far as, far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,

and makes the nations prove

the glories of his righteousness,

and wonders of his love,

and wonders of his love,

and wonders, wonders of his love.

CONCLUSION

voice 2c

Give praise for the mystery of our faith—

made incarnate in Christ Jesus.

Give thanks for the events in time

around which time coalesces.

Take joy in the events in human experience

that make God intimately a part of human experience.

solo

“O Holy Night!” (#160 in “The Worshipping Church,” vs. 1)

O holy night, the stars are brightly shining,

it is the night of the dear Savior’s birth;

long lay the world in sin and error pining,

till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.

A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,

for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!

Fall on your knees! O hear the angel voices!

O night divine! O night when Christ was born!

O night divine! O night, O night divine!

Benediction

Go from here this night

this night on which Christ was born—

this night we await.

Go from here—

to repeat the sounding joy

of truth and grace at work together—

Go from here—

to be a part of the thrill of hope—

to work for the rejoicing of our weary world.

Go from here

with angel voices ringing in your ears

to prepare your heart to make room.

Christ is born!

And your time on earth makes room for the divine.

You participate in the making fit of creation for heaven.

Go from here with the God with us, Immanuel,

even Jesus Christ,

Amen.

A Year of Surprises

A Litany for Epiphany

by Katie Cook



LEADER: 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?

PEOPLE: 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.

LEADER: 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?

PEOPLE: 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.

LEADER: 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?

PEOPLE: 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 from W.H. Auden's "For the Time Being")

Editor's Note:

On the following pages you will find some ideas for a service of commemoration of the life and inspiration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I have compiled these from the years I served on the Martin Luther King committee of the Waco Ministerial Alliance. For the first several years we held a prayer breakfast. We often played audiotapes of the famous 1963 "Freedom Speech" while participants ate. We changed the venue to Saturday mid-morning services with a brunch, and then to the official holiday Monday. We alternated between churches (and synagogues) that were traditionally Caucasian and traditionally African-American. One year we had a march from a predominantly Caucasian church across the Baylor University campus to a predominantly African-American church. We held portions of the service in the former and finished in the latter, with a luncheon there also.

In addition to the use of the "Freedom Speech" tape, we used things like U2's song "MLK" from the Unforgettable Fire album and music by Sweet Honey in the Rock. Most of the time, however, we stayed with the congregational singing of "Lift Every Voice and Sing" and "We Shall Overcome."

I have gone through the services that we have held in the last eight years and picked out several elements that I hope you will find helpful. These services were significant in building bonds in our community across racial and religious lines.

—lk

Keeping the Dream Alive



*a prayer service celebrating the dreams
of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

“Keeping the Dream Alive”



*Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;
but those who wait for the Lord
shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up
with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.
Isaiah 40:30-31 (NRSV)*

Welcome

Invocation

Scripture Reading:

Isaiah 42:1-7

Congregational Singing:

"Lift Every Voice and Sing"

Litany:

"Keeping the Dream Alive"

by Katie Cook

LEADER: We are people of faith who have gathered here today because we have something to say, together, to our friend and brother, Martin:

PEOPLE: We have come here today because we still have a dream.

LEADER: Although it looks as though we've not come so far,

PEOPLE: We still have a dream.

LEADER: Although the fear and mistrust of "the other" still makes us strangers who should be neighbors,

PEOPLE: We still have a dream.

LEADER: Although apartheid is not yet dead in our world, and racial tension mounts in our own land,

PEOPLE: We still have a dream.

LEADER: Although economic freedom is still not shared by everyone in our society,

PEOPLE: We still have a dream.

LEADER: We lift up the friendships that have been forged, the victories that have been won, however small,

PEOPLE: For these keep the dream alive.

LEADER: Though we know that more should have been accomplished by now,

PEOPLE: We will not give up our dream.

LEADER: Together, we lift these thoughts to God for blessing,

PEOPLE: That these seeds, our fervent hopes and prayers, will bear fruit in the coming weeks and years,

ALL Until we truly are free, free at last.

Interfaith Readings:

Ezekiel 34: 25-31

1 John 5: 16b-21

Reading from *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*

(you may add your own interfaith readings here)

(we also added a season of interfaith prayers here, with prayers in Persian, Yoruba, Japanese, Spanish, German, and Russian)

Musical Benediction:

"We Shall Overcome"



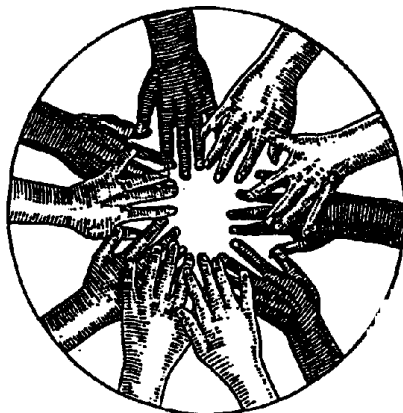
An eye for an eye and a
tooth for a tooth will do
nothing but eventually
leave us all blind
and toothless.

...

Through our scientific ge-
nius we have made of this
world a neighborhood; now
through our moral and
spiritual development we
must make of it a brother-
hood. In a real sense, we
must all learn to live to-
gether as brothers, or we
will all perish together as
fools. We must come to
see that no individual can
live alone; no nation can
live alone. We must all live
together; we must all be
concerned about each
other.

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

COVER ART



Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light
can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only
love can do that.

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.