



Room at the Inn

Worship Resources for the Creative Church--Advent & Christmastide 2010

Sacred Seasons, a series of worship packets with a peace and justice emphasis,

from Seeds of Hope Publishers: 602 James; Waco, TX 76706; Phone: 254/755-7745;

Fax: 254/753-1909; E-mail: seedseditor@clearwire.net; Web address: www.seedspublishers.org.

Sacred Seasons:



Creative Worship Tools for Your Church

These unique worship resource packets are available for the liturgical year, three packets a year for \$100 (\$125 for non-US subscriptions), one packet for \$50 (\$65 outside of the US).

Staff and Volunteers

Editor.....L. Katherine Cook
Business Manager.....Linda Freeto
Copy Editor.....Deborah E. Harris
Act Locally Waco Editor.....Ashley B. Thornton
Editorial Assistants.....Rachel Madders,
Maegan Weber, Sarah Williams
Library Assistants.....Bill Hughes,
Sandy Weynand
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

2010 Council of Stewards

Sally Lynn Askins (Vice President)
Meg Cullar
Deborah E. Harris (Secretary)
B. Michael Long (President)

Board of Advisors

Dale A. Barron
H. Joseph Haag
Daniel B. McGee
Kathryn Mueller
Jon Singletary

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. The mailing address is: 602 James; Waco, TX 76706; Phone: 254/755-7745; Fax: 254/753-1909; E-mail: seedseeditor@clearwire.net. Web address: www.seedspublishers.org. Copyright © 2010.

Material in this packet is for the use of the purchasing faith community to enhance worship and increase awareness in economic justice issues. ISSN 0194-4495. Seeds of Hope,

Room at the Inn

In this worship packet:

- 3 Theme Interpretation: *Just Keep Your Eyes Open*
- 4 Week 1: Making Room for Hope
- 5 *A Few Ideas for a Fair Christmas*
- 6 *Salt, Light & Advent: a meditation*
- 7 *Los Posadas: a Mexican Tradition of Hospitality*
- 11 Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings
- 12 Week 2: Making Room for Peace
- 13 *The Innkeeper: a Christmas monologue*
- 14 *The Shepherd: a Christmas monologue*
- 15 *Simeon: a Christmas monologue*
- 16 Week 3: Making Room for Peace
- 17 *A House of Another's Shoes: a drama for children*
- 19 Week 4: Making Room for Love
- 20 *The Gift of Love: a sermon*
- 23 *Twelve Days of Welcome: activities for children & others*
- 24 Benediction

A word about this packet

This worship packet was produced, as are all of our resources, with a great deal of love and prayer. We bring these gifts of writing together, using the smallest possible number of resources. We want you to be able to use these contents to enhance your congregation's Advent experience.

The cover art, and all of the new art, in this issue was created by Sally Lynn Askins, who is also the vice president for the Seeds Council of Stewards. Other art that is new to our publications is by Helen Siegl and Gertrude Mueller Nelson. Deborah Harris, the Seeds council's secretary and our indefatigable proofreader, wrote the meditations to introduce the four weeks in Advent.

The contents of this packet are your congregation's to use freely and share with others as the need arises. We pray that these materials, and the other packets that we have planned for the next liturgical year, will help you in leading your congregation into a new awareness of divine hospitality. May we together learn to love the stranger in our midst, and welcome him or her as we welcome the Christ Child.

—Gratefully, *The Staff and Council of Stewards*

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 © 2003 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission.

Just Keep Your Eyes Open

The coming of Christ is, in many essential ways, about welcoming the stranger. Joseph and Mary were strangers in Bethlehem. Later, they were refugees from a tyrannical despot. They were an oppressed people, a religious minority in the minds of the ruling government. The child himself was a stranger in this world.

With that in mind, the real theme for this packet—and for all of the *Sacred Seasons* packets for the coming liturgical year, is hospitality. So, interspersed with traditional language about Advent and Christmas, you will find words about welcoming the stranger. The God whose embrace encompasses you and me and those who are strange to us, calls us to be diligent in hospitality.

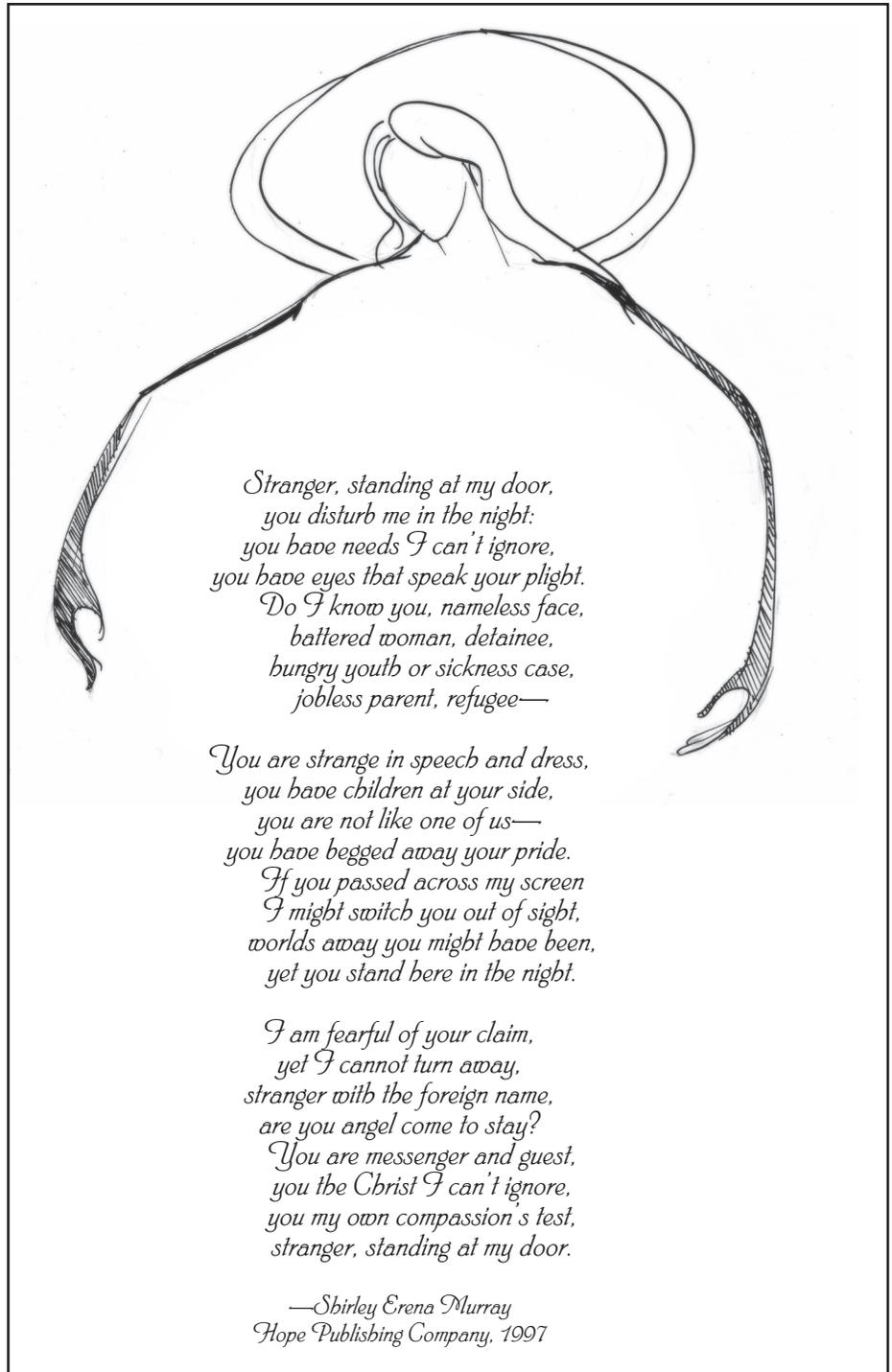
God commands the Hebrews in Deuteronomy 10:19, "You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." You shall LOVE the stranger. Not tolerate him, not accept her conditionally. Love him. Love her.

"I was a stranger, and you welcomed me," Jesus said in what has been called his "final exam." Let us begin now, as we prepare to welcome the Christ Child, to also prepare to welcome the aliens, the neighbors in need and the riffraff that he asked us to receive as we would receive him.

The writer of Hebrews reiterated this in chapter 13 verse 2: "Do not neglect to show

hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it."

As my former student Van Darden once said, "Just keep your eyes open."—lkc



Week 1: Making Room for Hope



art by Sallylynn Askins

For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from God."

—Psalm 62:5

"Hustle and bustle" isn't just a phrase for the holidays anymore. Working, "texting" and keeping up with demanding schedules often leave us exhausted, with very little room in our hearts and minds for much else. And our fears about money, jobs, wars and more shift our focus from the daily-bread needs of people all around us. That's why we need to be reminded, again and again, that our hope rests in God, and in the Word that the darkness cannot extinguish. We must make room to be still, to remember whose we are and to be freed to serve in God's name.

—Deborah E. Harris

Lectionary Texts:

Isaiah 2:1-5

Psalm 122

Romans 13:11-14

Matthew 24:36-44

A Few Ideas for a Fair Christmas

by LeDayne McLeese Polaski

“IT’S NOT FAIR!” If you are a parent, you likely hear this several times a day. Everything from dessert sizes to bedtimes are occasions for children to spot real or imagined unfairness.

The truth is, the world isn’t fair, and, far too often, in ways that matter far more than the size of our slice of cake or the fact that “everybody else” gets to stay up until 10. It isn’t fair, for instance, that some children work in sweatshops while other children (like mine) go to school.

It isn’t fair that huge numbers of people go to bed hungry every night while I try to figure out how to fit all the leftovers into the fridge.

It isn’t fair that people work hard for wages that don’t even cover the basics of food and shelter. We all know the world isn’t fair, but can we do anything about it?

YES! No one of us can transform the world, but we can make more informed choices that help make our day-to-day lives conform to our beliefs and values.

A Fair Christmas

It is a bit odd, isn’t it? We celebrate the birth of a peasant child born in a borrowed barn by trying to find the perfect gift for “the person who has everything.” We bombard our already over-STUFFed kids with even more stuff. And we often spend money we don’t have to do so.

Now, I love Christmas—even in its goofy secular forms. I don’t want to be a Scrooge or a Grinch, and I won’t claim that I get through the season without several visits to Target, but here are some ways to make Christmas

fairer (and less expensive.)

1. *Shop at Consignment or Thrift Stores.* Buying used goods is not only cheaper, it’s fairer. The proceeds do not go into the pockets of huge companies, and they often benefit great causes. Look in your community for consignment shops, resale shops and thrift stores. You can find all kinds of treasures there—and sometimes it hasn’t even been used.

2. *Alternative Gifts.* For the person who truly has “everything,” why buy more? There are great ways to give gifts that benefit others. You can buy a gift certificate that will allow them to make a micro-loan through Kiva (www.kiva.org). Children enjoy giving to the Heifer International (www.heifer.org) World Ark, where you can buy, in someone’s honor, a duck or a goat that will go to someone in need across the globe. Habitat for Humanity (www.habitat.org/support/giftfromtheheart.aspx) is another great organization for alternative giving. At Church World Service (www.churchworldservice.org), you can give a clean-up kit or a medical kit for someone in a disaster area or refugee camp.

With a little thought, you can give an alterative gift that reflects every recipient’s values. My mother-in-law cried the year that I gave her warm clothes for needy kids.

3. *Fair-Trade Gifts.* Fairly traded goods guarantee living wages and decent working conditions for the people who make them. Two great sources for this are Ten Thousand Villages (www.tenthousandvillages.com) and SERV V (www.servv.org). They offer beautiful fair-trade home décor, gifts, jewelry and more. We have a TTV store in



Charlotte, where I live, and I always start my Christmas shopping there. I buy Christmas decorations for our house there as well.

4. *The Gift of Time.* One of my all-time favorite gifts was a torn sheet of notebook paper on which my daughter Kate had written “gift certificate for hugs and kisses.”

In our all-too-hurried society, a promise to meet monthly for coffee would be a lovely gesture. Or perhaps you have a skill that you can share such as a gift of sewing or cooking—or, even better, teaching someone to sew or cook.

5. *All of the Above.* If you like the idea of having “something under the tree,” you can do a combination of the ideas above. With a bit of imagination, you can give themed gift combos.

My gift to my father this year, for instance, will be a bottle of red wine we bought at Yellowstone National Park, along with a donation in his honor to the National Parks. One year, I gave my husband Tom a donation to

No one of us can transform the world, but we can make more informed choices that help make our day-to-day lives conform to our beliefs and values.

the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation and the promise of a shared hike.

There are LOTS of ways to celebrate Christmas that add joy and fairness to our lives and those of others. May we bring a little more peace to our world this Christmas in just that way.

—LeDayne McLeese Polaski is the Program Coordinator for the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, which is based in Charlotte, NC.

Salt, Light & Advent

by Mark McClintock

Scripture: Matthew 5:13-16

Salt. It's a pretty useful substance. Just try eating a French fry before the chef sprinkles them with a little Morton's. Besides its tastiness, salt serves as a preservative, an ingredient in chemical compounds, and (at least in the northern climates) a trusted agent for melting the ice on roads and walkways. It's also a vivid word in the English language—a sailor is an “old salt,” a teller of colorful stories and jokes is said to be “salty,” and hard-working folks with integrity are considered “salt of the earth.”

When I take a tally of the people who surrounded Jesus in the days leading up to and following his birth, a great many of them seem to fit these descriptions: Mary the humble peasant girl, Joseph the patient carpenter, the coarse shepherds—and those two elderly saints of the Temple community, Anna and Simeon. Because of their faithfulness, we anticipate the coming of true, complete joy and peace—light in the midst of darkness.

Advent is upon us, and it's time for us to take on the roles of these pageant personalities. As people of the light, we have an obligation to shine. As sacred salt, we need to be useful to Christ. Whether it's the preservation of hope, being a catalyst for positive change, melting the frozen hearts of those who struggle to love—or simply adding genuine flavor to a world seduced by the blandishments of jingly television ads and fancy coffee in a cardboard or Styrofoam cup—Jesus calls upon each of us to make a difference. After all, who looks forward to unseasoned potatoes?

God, Creator of our Senses, make us flavorful and bright. Amen.

—Mark McClintock is Coordinator of PASSPORTkids! a summer camp for 3rd-6th grade children. PASSPORT is a national nonprofit student ministry empowering students to encounter Christ, embrace community and extend grace to the world.

art by Gertrud Mueller Nelson



Las Posadas: a Mexican Tradition of Hospitality

by Katie Cook

Introduction

Las Posadas make up a traditional Mexican and US Southwest tradition in celebration of the Nativity of Christ. *Las Posadas* means, literally, “the inns.” Begun in Franciscan missions in Mexico some 500 years ago, these celebrations take place on the nine days before Christmas Eve, which is known in these areas as Noche Buena or “Holy Night.”

Each Posada is a dramatic re-enactment of Joseph and Mary—*Los Peregrinos* (the pilgrims) *San José y la Virgen María*—looking for lodging in Bethlehem. Starting on December 16, nine families will agree to host one evening’s Posada, finishing on Noche Buena. A number of families must also agree to turn the pilgrims away each evening—usually two homes for each evening.

Each home has a Nativity scene, with the Bambino not placed yet. The hosts for the evening are the innkeepers, and the guests accompany *Los Peregrinos*, who walk from house to house and request lodging.

The guests often carry lighted candles, or paper lanterns, as they walk. Sometimes teenagers are chosen to carry small figurines of Joseph and Mary (on a donkey), and sometimes children dress up as the Holy Parents. Usually a chant is used between the innkeepers and the guests, and the guests are turned away from two homes before they get to the host home.

The Chants

JOSEPH AND MARY: In the name of God we beg; will you let us enter? We are tired and we are cold. May we please have shelter?

THE INNKEEPERS: You look dirty and you smell. Will you please keep moving? For your kind there is no place, for our inn is decent.

JOSEPH AND MARY: It is not by our own choice that today we travel. But the Emperor has said that we all must be counted.

THE INNKEEPERS: We care not for your reasons. Every room is taken. Can’t you see the place is full? You are bad for business.

JOSEPH AND MARY: Will the child be born tonight out on a street corner? Can’t you find a place for him? Do you have no pity?

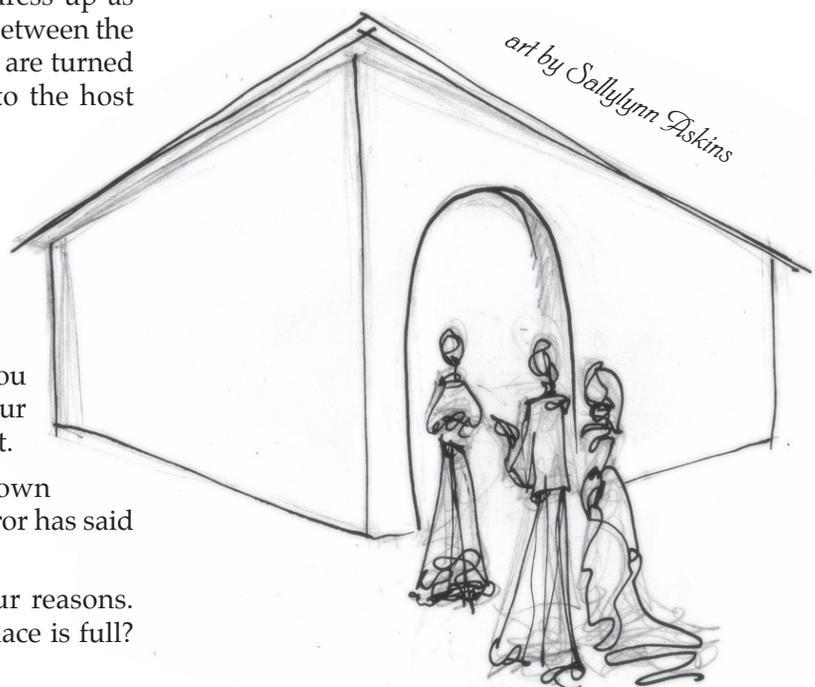
THE INNKEEPERS: Oh, my goodness, do come in. You can use the manger. For the rooms that we do have are for a rich traveler.

ALL: Holy Jesus, you are still with the poor and homeless;
If we wish to do your will,
we will bid them welcome.
Holy Jesus, do forgive,
in this Christmas season,
That the way in which we live
so beclouds our vision.

(Translated from traditional chants by Justo Gonzales. For a Spanish version, see the sidebar on page 8. The last verse is written by Justo Gonzales.)

Inside the “Inn”

Once the guests are inside, they sometimes gather around a Nativity scene to pray and / or sing Christmas



songs. After this, the guests enjoy refreshments: perhaps a simple supper of traditional Mexican food, or perhaps a dessert with hot cider or punch. The children often celebrate with a piñata.

(Modern piñatas are made from *papier mache* in different shapes, decorated with crepe paper and filled with sweets. The children are blindfolded and given sticks to beat the piñata until the contents spill out.)

In the predominantly Catholic homes in these areas, the families will attend midnight Mass, *Misa de Noche Buena*, on December 24 after the *Posada*. Some wait until after the Mass to have a special dinner with family and friends.

Sometimes a friend who is without family will be invited to join a family, and that guest will place the figure for the Baby Jesus in the manger of the Nativity scene. People exchange gifts, or give gifts to the children, on January 6, *el día de Reyes*, “the day of the Kings.”

A Focus on Displaced Persons

The ancient Posadas were observed to remind the faithful that the parents of the Baby Jesus were homeless, and that the family also became refugees from Herod the Great’s slaughter of the infants in Judea. We have tried to carry on the spirit of the ancient Posadas by choosing nine groups of displaced or homeless people to remember on each evening, and using the worship time to share information about them.

You can be as elaborate as you would like with this. The homes could be decorated with objects from the country or area of origin for each group. The food could also be organized around these themes. Joseph and Mary could be dressed as each group might dress. Or you could simply share the information, or distribute copies of the information below.

These are descriptions of nine groups of refugees, displaced persons and other homeless people. The term “refugee” is used to describe people who have fled from their country. “Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)” are people who have been forced from their homes, but who stay within their country’s borders.

1. Colombia

Colombia has one of the highest rates of IDPs in the world. Refugee organizations

estimate that between 3.3 million and almost 5 million people were internally displaced in Colombia as of 2010, mostly because of a 50-year civil war in the area. Defenseless people are caught between government troops and rebel forces. 21 million Colombians are poor and 6 million live in extreme poverty.

Half of the pregnant women and children suffer from anemia. Coffee farmers are often exploited by global coffee companies, causing a large number to live in poverty. Also, a US military practice of spraying pesticides on Colombian land to try to kill coca crops (the plant that yields cocaine) has proven to kill almost everything but the coca—and to cause widespread sickness among the people.

There are 45.7 million people in Colombia. The official language is Spanish, although many indigenous groups speak their own dialects.

Sources: World Food Programme, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, personal interviews

2. Pakistan

Fighting in the North-West Frontier Province and Federally Administered Tribal Areas displaced about

Chants Español

VILLANCICOS PARA PEDIR POSADAS

LOS PEREGRINOS: En el nombre del cielo, yo os pido posada, pues no puede andar, mi esposa amada.

LOS HOSTELEROS: Aquí no es mesón, sigan adelante, no les puedo abrir, no vaya a ser un tunante.

SE REPITEN LAS MISMAS ESTROFAS EN DOS CASAS MAS Y EN LA TERCERA LES DAN POSADA.

LOS PEREGRINOS: Posada le pido amado casero, pues madre va a ser, la reina del cielo.

LOS HOSTELEROS: Pues si es una reina, quien lo solicita, como es que de noche, anda tan solita.

LOS PEREGRINOS: Mi nombre es José, Mi esposa es María, y madre va ser, Divino Verbo.

LOS HOSTELEROS: Posada os brindo, Santos Peregrinos, y disculpa os pido, no os reconocía.

TODOS: Entren Santos Peregrinos, Peregrinos...Reciban este rincón, que aunque es pobre la morada, la morada...os las doy de corazón.

—Traditional chant, courtesy of Justo Gonzales

3 million people in Pakistan since 2008. The fighting destroyed communities in the area, making them extremely vulnerable. In July 2010, displaced people were returning to and attempting to rebuild their homes, when heavy monsoon rains forced them to leave again.

The massive floods affected 20 million people and left 6 million in need of emergency assistance. Before the floods, about 45 million people in Pakistan were deemed food-insecure, according to a UN joint assessment. While they spend up to 70 percent of their incomes on food, they are unable to afford adequate food because of high prices.

About 36 percent of the people in Pakistan live below the poverty line, and almost 40 percent are illiterate.

Sources: World Food Programme

3. Guatemala

Guatemala has the fourth highest chronic malnutrition rate in the world. Almost 50 percent of children under the age of 5 are chronically malnourished. The statistics are worse in rural areas, where poverty affects 70 percent of the population. This can be attributed to their lack of health services, water and sanitation systems.

The last four months have been a season of disasters for Guatemala. In May, Volcano Pacaya erupted, and Tropical Storm Agatha hit shortly after. The 25 inches of rain caused floods and mudslides, and forced some 74,000 people to evacuate. In August, Guatemala endured more heavy rains.

As displaced people continue to rebuild their homes, many still need emergency relief.

Sources: World Food Programme, GOD'S CHILD Project

4. Kosovo

This landlocked region is located east of Albania and west of Serbia. Kosovo has endured conflict from ethnic divisions for decades. In February 2008, Kosovo declared independence from Serbia, but conflict still continues.

Currently, 90 percent of the population is comprised of Albanians, with the minority being the Serbs. Kosovo has a high unemployment rate of 44 percent, and almost half of the population lives in poverty. Their main natural resources are coal, lead, zinc and silver.

Sources: World Food Programme, BBC News

5. Sudan

The ongoing conflict in the western region of Darfur has caused about 2 million people to be displaced since 2003. Up to 3.6 million people in the region need

food assistance each month. In South Sudan, two decades of civil war have displaced 4 million people, forcing 600,000 of them out of the country to live as refugees.

The ongoing conflicts of both regions have destroyed the economy and infrastructure. Conflict is also an issue in the eastern region, as well as chronic food insecurity.

Varying droughts and floods affect the area and influence the lives of the people in the east, where the malnutrition rates are consistently above emergency levels. Landmines also pose a significant problem.

Sources: World Food Programme

6. Afghanistan

More than half of Afghanistan's population lives below the poverty line, making it one of the poorest countries in the world. According to The National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment of 2007-2008, one-third of the population lacks enough food to live healthy lives.

In 2008, the price of wheat drastically increased, which contributed to the food insecurity problem. War, drought and other environmental factors prevent economic recovery. Afghanistan has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world.

Their infant mortality rate is also high, and more than half of children under the age of five are malnourished. Because of war activity, over 100,000 Afghani people have been internally displaced in the past year.

Sources: World Food Programme, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

7. Karen Refugees in the US

The Karen people make up a large ethnic group in Myanmar (formally Burma). They are a Christian minority, and, because of oppression from the current regime in Myanmar and aggression against them by the country's official militia, they foster a rebel army. The Karen militia includes some 12,000 soldiers, who fight against 400,000 government troops.

This fighting, along with the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Karen people, has caused many hardships among the people. At least 240 Karen villages have been destroyed by government troops, who continue burning and looting homes. About 110,000 Karen now live in refugee camps along the Myanmar border.

Sources: The Global IDP Project, Baptist Peacemaker

8. US Street People

Not all homeless people are displaced by war or natural disasters. Many live on the streets because of personal crises. Some are mentally ill. Some are there

because of substance abuse. Some are there because they have “chosen not to live by society’s rules.” Some are there because they lost their job or got sick and they were among the huge group of working poor in the US, who are one paycheck or family emergency away from the street.

Although homeless people are notoriously difficult to count, the most reliable way of gauging the numbers is to check with shelters in each city. The Coalition for the Homeless in New York City reports 38,000 homeless people residing in various shelters in the city. The report said that 44 percent of these are children.

The US Department of Health and Human Services recently reported that 600,000 people go homeless each night in the this country. Thirty-six percent of these people are in families. According to an estimate a few years ago by the National Coalition for the Homeless,

the average age of a homeless person in the US is 7 years.

Sources: *National Coalition for the Homeless, National Alliance to End Homelessness*

9. *Your Community*

For the ninth group, find out if there are homeless people in your community, or select a poverty population near you to highlight.

—Katie Cook is the *Seeds of Hope* editor. Rachel Badders, a *Seeds of Hope* intern, contributed valuable research to this article. Sources not mentioned in the text: *Worldbook Encyclopedia, the Global IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) Project, Hunger News & Hope, Alternatives for Simple Living. The translations and writings of Justo Gonzales are from the Alternatives publication To Celebrate, 1987.*

God, enlarge my heart that it may be big enough to receive the greatness of your love. Stretch my heart that it may take into it all those who, with me, around the world, believe in Jesus Christ. Stretch it, that it may take into it all those who do not know him but who are my responsibility because I know him. And stretch it that it may take in all those who are not lovely in my eyes and whose eyes I do not want to touch. Through Jesus Christ, Amen.

—*Ghanaian prayer*



art by Gertrud Mueller Nelson

Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings

Joy is still present when life is hard. Christ comes for grieving people with broken homes and broken hearts. Christmas is the promise that God cares for children who hunger for food, the lonely who hunger for love and all who hunger for peace. The Word becomes flesh wherever there is sadness, fear or emptiness. God comes to be with us in our dark valleys, bind our broken hearts and carry us when we're tired and weary.

—Brett Younger

Lord of the excluded,
open my ears to those I would
prefer not to hear,
open my life to those I would
prefer not to know,
open my heart to those I would
prefer not to love,
and so open my eyes to see
where I exclude you.

—the Iona Community

All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me."...Proper honor must be shown to all.... All humility should be shown in addressing a guest on arrival and departure....Great care and concern are to be shown in receiving the poor people and pilgrims, because in them more particularly is Christ received.

—The Rule of St. Benedict

Lives and hearts get broken—those of people we love, those of people we'll never meet. The world sometimes feels like the waiting room of the emergency

ward, and we who are more or less OK for now need to take the tenderest possible care of the more wounded people in the waiting room, until the healer comes. You sit with people, you bring them juice and graham crackers.

—Anne Lamott

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



art by Gertrud Mueller Nelson

Week 2: Making Room for Peace

We cannot make room for Advent unless we follow the path of peace. The journey takes us from the shelter of a mother's womb to the exposure of a wayward world. We travel by way of a shiny-eyed toddler holding fast to his father's finger, who grows into a precocious boy holding his own with the temple elders. We meet a young man who learns a carpenter's trade, and then becomes a teacher who would trade his life for any one of us, for all of us. Indeed, the way of peace is not without conflict or paradox. It is ultimately a matter of the heart. And where the journey ends it begins again.

—Deborah E. Harris

Lectionary Texts:

Isaiah 11:1-10

Psalm 72:1-7,18-19

Romans 15:4-13

Matthew 3:1-12



art by Sallylynn Askins

The Innkeeper

A Christmas Monologue

by Crystal Goolsby

Scripture: Luke 2:4-20

Setting: A stable; the innkeeper is tending animals. You might consider using painted backdrops of stable animals. There should be a hay trough. The innkeeper could be moving hay to the trough. He is dressed in simple but good clothing from the first century BCE.

I knew something great was going to happen last night. The animals were more lively than usual, and the night was more beautiful than any I have ever seen. We were quite busy, with people coming to Bethlehem from all over for the Roman census.

Whom do I see, coming there in the distance? Ah, it's a man with a very pregnant woman! They seem so exhausted, and she looks to be due to give birth soon. But I have no rooms left!

"Good evening, sir. I am Joseph. I am a carpenter from Nazareth, and this is my wife," the man says to me.

"Good evening to you as well," I say. "I am sorry, sir, but there are no vacancies here. All the shelter I can offer you is to sleep here in the stable, with the animals."

"I will take what you can offer, sir," he said. "As you can see, my wife is going to have her baby soon. She is exhausted and cannot walk any further tonight. I appreciate your hospitality."

A few hours later, I woke with an unexplainable joyous feeling. I stepped outside and looked toward the stable, and I discovered that the woman had given birth to her baby. She was sitting and gently rocking the hay trough, which was the only place in the stable for a new baby to sleep. I should have thought about that.

Something seemed very different about this child, though I could not quite figure out what that difference was. I walked into the stable and felt a sense of awe toward this newborn, who is sleeping soundly.

I felt so badly that I could not offer these kind people more than these meager sleeping arrangements, but during tax time, it was a miracle I even had the stable available!

I decided I would send my wife out later with some food and drinks for the guests. They had not asked for anything but a place to lay their new son, and they had not complained. Even the animals could not turn their eyes away from this special little boy.

(Looks at the hay trough) He looked so peaceful, barely

even stirring in his sleep. I offered my congratulations to the young couple, and I offered a silent blessing to their baby—I don't really know why—and then I headed back toward the inn. I only had a few more precious hours to sleep before the inn would again be buzzing and my guests would need my attention.

Just as I was about to go back inside of the inn, I saw some shepherds approaching, so I stayed outside to see what they wanted. They went straight to the stable, greeted Joseph and his wife—I found out that her name was Mary. Then they kneeled before the infant and exclaimed, "It is just as the angel of the Lord told us!"

The angel of the Lord? I thought there was something special about him, but this was amazing! They said that this was the Savior, the Messiah whom we've been waiting for, at last! Could it be? I ran and told my wife. I wanted to wake all of the guests and tell them. It was the most amazing night of my life. Perhaps this child really can change the world!

—Crystal Goolsby is a freelance writer in Austin, TX. For more monologues by Goolsby, go to the Seeds web site at www.seedspublishers.org and look under the Worship tab for With Our Own Eyes, a collection of resurrection monologues for Eastertide.

art by Helen Siegl



The Shepherd

A Christmas Monologue

by Crystal Goolsby

Scripture: Luke 2:8-20, NIV

Setting: A field. The shepherd is dressed in peasant garments. You might consider a painted backdrop showing sheep on a hillside at night.

There was something about tonight that seemed different. We were tending our herds like any other night—but, tonight, everything around us seemed to be trembling with excitement. What was about to happen? We didn't know.

It happened right here on this hillside. We were sitting and keeping watch, to make sure no predators came to harm our sheep. Then, suddenly—out of nowhere—an angel appeared in the sky! Imagine that! I have heard of people seeing these messengers, but how marvelous it was for one to show itself to us—lowly shepherds! Why us? I was scared to death!

The angel said, "Do not be afraid. I bring you news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David"—he meant Bethlehem—"a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord." What? The Messiah? "This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Then, as if this were not amazing enough, a huge group of heavenly beings joined the angel. The sky lit up like daytime, and we heard a thousand beautiful voices saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to all people."

The light and voices disappeared as quickly as they came. All we could do, at first, was stare at each other. We were speechless. Was it a dream? I thought so at first, but we could not have all had the same dream!

We all jumped up and announce in unison, "Let's go to Bethlehem. Let's see what the angel was talking about."

I had to go. I had to find this child. Leaving our sheep for the time being, we jumped on our donkeys and rode as fast as we could toward the town of David. They seemed as excited as we were, and they seemed to know exactly where to go.

Once we arrived in Bethlehem, the donkeys slowed to a trot. We must be getting close. They were heading toward an inn. I tried to redirect my donkey, but he refused to change his course. I thought the angel said the child would be in a hay trough.

Then, as we got nearer to the inn, I could see where the donkey was heading. He was going toward the inn's stable. I could see the innkeeper in the courtyard, watching. I wonder if he knows that there's something special about this night—about this child.

We entered the stable and found a man and a woman who was exhausted. And there, indeed, was a baby wrapped in cloths, lying in the hay trough. I didn't know what to do. I just bowed to the child. We had to explain to the man and woman why we were there. They seemed as bewildered as we were.

The baby was sleeping so soundly. I thought to myself, "Does he know about what the angel said? Does he know that people are saying he is the Messiah? Does he know he's the one we've been waiting for?"

We returned to our fields, thinking about all we had seen this night. Then we offered thanks and praise to the God of Israel for keeping the promise that was made to us so long ago.

—Crystal Goolsby is a freelance writer in Austin, TX. For more monologues by Goolsby, go to the Seeds web site at www.seedspublishers.org and look under the Worship tab for With Our Own Eyes, a collection of resurrection monologues for Eastertide.



art by Helen Siegl

Simeon

A Christmas Monologue

by Crystal Goolsby

Scripture: Luke 2:25-35

Setting: The courtyard of the temple in Jerusalem. It could be outside, if the weather permits. Simeon is an old man, dressed nicely but not sumptuously. He sits on a stool.

I am so tired. I feel so old. But I knew I must carry on without complaint, as the Lord told me, until the Christ came. I eagerly waited for that day, so that not only my burden, but also the burden of Israel would be lifted.

The Lord told me that I would live until I had seen the Messiah. Though I was eager, I felt the weight of my age. I wondered how many more days I would pass in this world before that day came. I was determined to wait patiently, here in the temple, until the Messiah appears.

But then, at last, I looked and saw a simple man and woman come into the courtyard with a small baby. They had come for the ritual of purification.

What a beautiful child he was! And so serene! As they drew closer, I could feel the Lord's protection around them. This child must be very important.

"Greetings, Sir," the man said to me, as he approached. His wife offered a kind, but tired, smile.

And then I knew. It was he. It was the one I have been waiting for so long. He was the child the Lord had told me I would see—the one who would deliver Israel.

I approached the man, and he gingerly offered the sleeping child to me. "His name is Yeshua," he says. "God has saved us." That's what it means.

I took him into my arms and gazed down at the tranquil face. I wondered if this child knew the burden he was about to lift from me. I wondered if he knew the burden he will lift from everyone, in every city. I glanced up at the heavens and said:

"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
You can now dismiss your servant in peace.
For my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the sight
of all people,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel."

What joy I felt! I could now go to be with the Lord, and be free from my physical burdens, knowing that the Messiah had come.

I blessed both of the boy's parents, who stared at me with awe and surprise. I then looked at the baby's mother and told her, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel. He will be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul, too."

She was clearly unable to grasp what I told her. I wasn't totally sure, myself. I feel that someday, long after I'm gone, she will understand. I handed the baby back to his father and watched them walk away.

—Crystal Goolsby is a freelance writer in Austin, TX. For more monologues by Goolsby, go to the Seeds web site at www.seedspublishers.org and look under the Worship tab for *With Our Own Eyes*, a collection of resurrection monologues for Eastertide.

art by Helen Siegl



Week 3: Making Room for Joy

The angelic tidings of great joy and salvation greet us and give us direction wherever we find ourselves this Advent. As Eugene Peterson so beautifully interprets Psalm 19:7-8, "The revelation of God is whole and pulls our lives together. The signposts of God are clear and point out the right road. The life-maps of God are right, showing the way to joy." In Christ, we come face to face with the Joy of all our longing hearts. We encounter a holy joy not subject to whim and circumstance—a joy that runs deep and true, even in the midst of pain and loss and doubt and tragedy. This unquenchable joy could never be contained in one sacred season of life, but instead journeys with us, no matter which way we are called to go home.

—Deborah E. Harris

Lectionary Texts:

Isaiah 35:1-10

Psalm 146:5-10

or Luke 1:46b-55

James 5:7-10

Matthew 11:2-11



art by Sallylynn Askins

The House of Another's Shoes

A Drama for Children

By Mark McClintock

Author's note: A large cardboard box sits on its side in front of the center stage door. Its open side faces the audience, and there is a SLEEPER hidden in a bundled-up blanket inside it. PLAYERS enter from both sides. One player is called SEER.

SEER: What's that?

PLAYER 1: What's what?

SEER: Over there.

PLAYER 2: Over where?

SEER: Right there! Look at the door.

PLAYER 3: That's a door. It's yellow, you knock on it.

SEER: I know it's a door. What's that in front of the door?

PLAYER 4: I don't see anything.

SEER: Down at the bottom. Look at that box.

PLAYER 3: It's a box. It's made of cardboard, you put things in it.

PLAYER 5: There's already something in it!

PLAYER 4: I don't see anything.

PLAYER 1: It's just a heap of trash.

PLAYER 6: Ewwww, that's disgusting! Who left trash outside their door?

PLAYER 5: I don't think it's trash. Looks more like clothes.

PLAYER 2: Maybe it's someone's dirty laundry.

PLAYER 6: Ewwww, that's REALLY disgusting! Who left stinky socks and underwear outside their door?

PLAYER 3: Wait a minute, it might not be stinky socks and underwear. It might be something valuable.

PLAYER 1: Like what?

PLAYER 5: Clean socks and underwear!

PLAYER 3: My uncle once found a box that had been in his basement for years. He opened it, and it was full of rare coins. They were worth a ton of money!

PLAYER 4: Treasure!

PLAYER 5: Hey, maybe this box is full of treasure!

PLAYER 2: Let's go look!

ALL: Yeah!!!

EVERYONE moves toward the box. SLEEPER moves and moans in their sleep. EVERYONE screams or gasps and runs back to where they were.

PLAYER 6: That's the scariest laundry I ever saw!

SEER: Did you see that??

PLAYER 4: See what?

SEER: That thing in the box!

PLAYER 4: I didn't see anything.

SEER: Then why did you scream?

PLAYER 4: Because YOU saw something.

PLAYER 1: There's something alive in there.

PLAYER 3: No, there isn't.

SEER: Yes, yes, there is, there is! I saw it!

PLAYER 5: What did you see?

PLAYER 6: Something moving!

PLAYER 2: Maybe it was just your imagination.

PLAYER 6: What's my imagination doing in that box???

PLAYER 4: I don't believe there's anything alive in there. I'd have to see it with my own eyes.



art by Gertrud Mueller Nelson

SLEEPER moves and moans again.

PLAYER 4: *Gasps and covers eyes with hands.* Not seeing! Not seeing!

SEER: There IS someone alive in that box. I'm going to find out who it is. *Goes to box and lifts up blanket.*

SLEEPER: *Wakes up, sits up, and stretches.* Good morning.

PLAYER 3: Um... it's already one o'clock in the afternoon.

SLEEPER: For me, that's a good morning.

PLAYER 1: What are you doing in that box?

SLEEPER: This is my house.

PLAYER 6: What??? A box isn't a house!!!

SLEEPER: For me, it is.

PLAYER 5: It doesn't have rooms, and it doesn't have windows or doors. It doesn't even have a Welcome Mat!

SLEEPER: *Holds out his arms.* Welcome! Come on in.

PLAYER 6: No way. I'm not climbing in a dirty old box that some hobo has been sleeping in.

PLAYER 3: Me either!

Most of the others speak up in agreement—e.g., "Yeah! That's right! Not me!"

SEER: Do you really live in that box?

SLEEPER: It's the only home I have.

PLAYER 2: Everybody has a house to live in.

SLEEPER: Not me.

PLAYER 4: Then there must be something wrong with you.

SLEEPER: Maybe if you were in my shoes, you'd understand.

PLAYER 3: I wouldn't want your shoes. They're old and filthy!

PLAYER 1: Yeah, I would never wear old, filthy shoes. All my shoes are new and filthy.

SEER: I'll try on your shoes.

PLAYER 6: Ewwwww, that's disgusting! You might get athlete's foot or stinky socks or something.

SEER: I read an old Native American saying once. It said, "Don't judge a person until you've walked two moons in their shoes."

SLEEPER: Do you really want to try on my shoes?

SEER: Sure.

PLAYER 3: *Marches off.* Well, I'm not staying around for this stinkfest.

SEER takes off shoes and trades with SLEEPER, slipping the old shoes on. Then SEER sits down inside the box, looking out.

PLAYER 6: Peeeeeeee-ewwwwwwww! That DOES stink!

SEER: Wow. You've had a hard life, haven't you?

SLEEPER: Easier than some. Harder than others.

SEER: And you've traveled a long way in these shoes.

SLEEPER: If I had a nickel for every mile I've walked, I'd be rich!

SEER: And you wear these shoes at night, too?

SLEEPER: If I took them off, someone would steal them.

SEER: I can see why you want a place to call home. It's a shelter, even if it is a box.

SLEEPER: To me, the world has been a pretty unfriendly place. But you're different. Why are you so friendly?

SEER: Do you believe in God?

SLEEPER: Reckon I do.

SEER: Well, I believe that God decided to put on human shoes. That's who Jesus is... God in human shoes.

PLAYER 5: *Laughs loudly.* God in human shoes! That's funny!

ALL: Shhhhhhhhhh!!!

SEER: Jesus didn't HAVE to put on human shoes. But he did it because he loves us. I guess I've gotten so much of his love, I can share it with someone else.

PLAYER 4: *(Weepy)* That's so beautiful!!!

SLEEPER: Thanks. I'm glad I invited you home.

SEER: Me, too. Want to come to my house?

SLEEPER: Really?

SEER: Really.

SLEEPER: Thanks, friend.

They exit hand in hand.

—Mark McClintock is Coordinator of PASSPORTkids! a summer camp for 3rd-6th grade children. PASSPORT is a national nonprofit student ministry empowering students to encounter Christ, embrace community and extend grace to the world.

Week 4: Making Room for Love



art by Sallylynn Askins

As we journey week by week through Advent, we come to the realization that we could never find our way to hope, peace or joy without love. Love opens our minds and hearts to all that is holy and shows us who we are meant to be. In her book *Opening to Miracles*, BettyClare Moffatt writes, "Practicing the presence of love changes your perceptions. And changing your perceptions creates miracles around you." Love has never been more *present* than in the birth of Jesus. Love made flesh, swaddled, and placed in our arms. To this world fractured by fear and hate and greed and despair, the Creator responds, not with punishment or judgment, but with love. Love is born, and when we are graced to love, we are born anew.

—Deborah E. Harris

"Lectionary Texts:

Isaiah 7:10-16

Psalms 80:1-7, 17-19

Romans 1:1-7

Matthew 1:18-25

The Gift of Love

A Sermon by Brett Younger

Matthew 1:18-25

Every once in a while, even in this “most wonderful time of the year, the hap-happiest season of all,” we go through difficult days, dark nights of the soul, when we have knots in our stomachs and our appetite disappears.

We can't fall asleep, because of trouble at home, trouble at work, trouble at church or trouble in the world. We think, “I've got to figure out how to fix this.” We could be smarter, but at the heart of it, what we really want is to be saved. We don't usually say it that way, but we need to be saved.

Joseph didn't feel like it was the hap-happiest time of the year. He had knots in his stomach. Nothing tasted right. He was up most of the night—confused and anxious. He couldn't figure out how to fix this.

Matthew's Gospel doesn't have any mangers or shepherds, no inns or stables, no choirs of angels, just the one. Matthew's account is about Joseph being told what Christmas is really about.

This is how the first Gospel tells the story of Jesus' birth. The people of Israel have been waiting for generations. Jesus' mother, Mary, was engaged to Joseph. Before they've lived together—if you know what Matthew means, wink, wink—Joseph is shocked to get the knee-buckling news that his fiancée is going to have a child that isn't his.

He's heartbroken. What's he to think? Will everyone know it isn't Joseph's? Will they know that Joseph knows? Whose is it, really? If your fiancée is pregnant and you were out of town when it happened, it's hard not to feel that her behavior is inexcusable.

Joseph is a carpenter, which means he's organized, each tool in the right place. Carpenters are good at math, exact. “Measure twice, cut once.” All the lines need to be kept straight. A carpenter's life is logical and practical.

But Joseph's well-ordered universe is falling apart and there seems to be no possibility of getting things back together any time soon. Orderly, careful Joseph is stuck in a mess that isn't his fault.

After several sleepless nights, Joseph decides to get out of it. He'll try to put all this behind him and get on with his life. His decision is logical, but “dismiss her quietly” sounds so unheroic. We wish Joseph would

be more like Johnny Depp and take Mary far away to a place where they can live happily ever after.

But Joseph, as Matthew puts it, is a “righteous man,” committed to keeping the law. According to Deuteronomy 22, Mary should be stoned to death. And yet, Joseph wants to be compassionate as well as righteous. So he interprets the law in the gentlest way possible. Joseph's decision to mostly obey the law by

*Mary sings about the baby
that's on the way, but Joseph
is too stunned to sing.
He takes his place in the story
without songs or speeches.*

“putting her away quietly” isn't a predictable response. It wouldn't be easy to pull off. Secrets don't always stay secret.

It's hard to say exactly how all this would work. It may mean trying to hide a tiny girl as she grows less tiny. Maybe they would send her to a home for unwed mothers.

Then the story gets even more interesting. When Joseph thinks he's figured the best way out of this predicament and finally falls asleep, he has a dream. The first thing the angel says is “Don't be afraid,” which is exactly what the angel says to Mary.

These three words, “don't be afraid,” are about the only thing that Luke's story and Matthew's story have in common. These words are important because Joseph, like Mary, has good reasons to be afraid. Joseph is caught in a disaster that could turn out to be a tragedy. He didn't ask to be the husband-to-be of the woman who would bear the Son of God. And yet, there he is.

It's curious that the church has focused so much on Mary, but so little on Joseph. Matthew's Gospel gives Joseph the most attention, and yet even Matthew tells us precious little about who Joseph was, what Joseph

did, and not one thing that Joseph said. Joseph doesn't say a single word in all of the Bible.

On this occasion, the angel does all of the talking: "Joseph, don't hesitate to get married. The Spirit made Mary pregnant. She will give birth to a son, and when she does, you will name him Jesus—'God saves'—because he will save you from your sins. The prophet Isaiah said, 'Watch for this—a virgin will get pregnant and bear a son; they will name him Emmanuel (God with us).'" In other words, *God will save you through this baby.*

There in Egypt, quietly, with no fanfare and not one word of detail in the Gospels, Joseph makes a home for Mary and the baby and watches as the child grows up in a refugee camp.

Joseph is trying to figure out what to do about this problem with Mary and an angel promises a baby will save them. It's a strange response—even for an angel in a dream.

Joseph wakes up and, surprisingly, does exactly what the angel commanded. It's amazing that this man who has always seen righteousness as a matter of following the rules now accepts the word of an angel.

Mary sings about the baby that's on the way, but Joseph is too stunned to sing. He takes his place in the story without songs or speeches. It's a strange way to save the world, to send a baby.

Things don't get easier for Joseph. There's the announcement from the emperor: he has to go back to his hometown to register for taxes. Joseph has too little to get by on as it is, and, with a baby on the way, what would these Romans be demanding next?

But Joseph loads his wife, now "great with child" (and isn't that a wonderful phrase?) on a donkey and makes the long journey down the rocky road to Bethlehem.

He not only sticks with Mary and the baby, but leads them to safety when Herod's terrible massacre of infants begins. They head out to a strange land.

There in Egypt, quietly, with no fanfare and not one word of detail in the Gospels, Joseph makes a home for Mary and the baby and watches as the child grows up in a refugee camp. Joseph returns home after Herod's death, still doing his part to share Christ with the world.

Joseph's life had been turned upside down from what he had thought it would be. Everything changed, because God had given him a love that would never end. You know Joseph still got confused and frustrated at times, but nothing was ever quite the same again. He did what God told him to do.

He stumbled along, without knowing for sure where things were headed. Joseph took his place in God's story, wading through the confusion and the mess, being led by God who has promised to save him. Joseph needed to be saved, so God sent a baby.

In the birth of a child, in the coming of Christ, everything changes forever. Think about the miracle of God's imagination, to send a Savior into the world by way of a homeless family, a truth-teller who challenges the lies that hold us down, a child who grows up to live for others all the way to the cross.

Jane Yarmolinsky writes, "The whole concept of God taking on human shape, and all the liturgy and ritual around that, had simply never made any sense to me. That was because, I realized one wonderful day, it was so simple. For people with bodies, important things like love have to be embodied. That's all. God had to be embodied, or else people with bodies would never in a trillion years understand about love."

This time of year, you may hear someone who's going through a hard time say, "It just doesn't feel like Christmas."

If you've been through a painful loss—the death of a loved one, a divorce, health concerns, the end of a job or a dream—then Christmas may seem like another source of sorrow, until we understand that the message of Christmas is that God will save us. And what we need most of all is to be saved.

The world gives us good reasons to be worried, but God is with us. God comes to where the oppressor and the oppressed struggle in brokenness and offers forgiveness. God comes among the destitute, among the privileged, among the old and young, among people of all nations, and offers grace.

God comes among those who misunderstand each other, who mistrust each other, who don't know the way out of the chaos, and offers love. God comes to the world of shattered dreams and constant sorrow and offers salvation.

Christ comes to save us from our sins and selfish ambitions. In Christ, we find purpose beyond who we are and what we have. Without God's salvation, life can become little more than trying to satisfy our selfish desires. Without Jesus, the world would be a lesser place.

God calls us to love that shatters what we know and pushes us into a new unknown on not much more than faith.

The one who comes to save us invites us beyond the rules, to the offering of ourselves to God.

Christ calls us away from our own worst errors, bad decisions and chronic sins, and toward the truly righteous people God would have us be—a people whose righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees, whose righteousness comes from God’s love, comes from Jesus.

Mike Yaconelli told a story about an angry man in his church who didn’t seem to have a kind bone in his body. Mike didn’t know how to respond to the man, but one day he said, “We have a group of young people who go to the nursing home to lead a worship service one Sunday evening a month. Would you be their driver?”

The man surprised him when he said, “Okay.”

The first Sunday the angry driver was at the nursing home, he sat in the back with his arms folded as the kids were doing their thing up front.

All of a sudden, someone was tugging at his arm. He looked down, and there was an elderly man in a wheelchair. The driver wasn’t sure what to do, so he took hold of the old man’s hand, and ended up holding his hand all during the service. The next month it happened again. The man in the wheelchair came and held the driver’s hand.

The next month, the next month, and the next month—hand in hand. Then the old man wasn’t there. The driver asked about him and was told, “He’s down the hall on the right, third door. He’s dying. He’s unconscious, but if you want to go and pray with him, that would be fine.”

Tubes and wires were all over the place, but he took the man’s hand and prayed that God would receive

him, that God would be with this man from this life into the next and give him eternal blessings.

As soon as he finished the prayer, the old man squeezed the driver’s hand. The once angry driver now had tears in his eyes. He stumbled out of the room and bumped into a woman.

*For people with bodies,
important things like love
have to be embodied.*

That’s all.

—Jane Yarmolinsky

She said, “He’s been waiting for you. He said that he didn’t want to die until he had the chance to hold Jesus’ hand one more time.”

The man was confused, “What do you mean?”

She explained, “My father said, ‘Once a month Jesus comes to the nursing home. He takes my hand and holds it for a whole hour. I don’t want to die until I have the chance to hold Jesus’ hand one more time.’”

God pushes us into unfamiliar territory. God saves us from our selfishness and smallness of spirit.

Who confuses your hands with the hands of Jesus? Who thinks your heart is the heart of Jesus? Who takes your words of encouragement as the words of Jesus?

God, help us to embody the gift of your love.

—Brett Younger teaches homiletics at McAphee Divinity School in Atlanta, GA.

*Welcome Jesus,
our humble gentle Saviour,
welcome to Bethlehem,
where we have loved and fought
and longed for the peace
the world can never give.
We ask for your peace,
your love, your gentleness,
and the courage to live that way.
—From the Christmas liturgy
in the New Zealand Prayer Book*

art by Helen Siegl



Twelve Days of Welcome

Activities for Children & Others

by Katie Cook

Author's note: Here are a few ideas that might help you learn how to be more welcoming to people who are new or different. Please make sure that you have talked with a parent or another grown-up before you do any of these things, or ask someone to help you or go with you when you do them.

1 Think of a person whom you see often who seems to you to look and act strangely. Maybe he or she speaks a language that you can't understand. Find a way to be kind to that person. Perhaps you could learn to say "hello" in his or her language.

2 Think of someone in your class at school who does things that make it hard for you to like him or her. Think of something nice to do for that person. You might consider praying for him or her.

3 Find out about someone in your church who is sick, and make a get-well card for him or her. Perhaps you could encourage your whole class to do this.

4 Make a Christmas stocking for a home-bound person in your family or in your church.

5 Encourage a group to go to a nursing home and sing Christmas carols for the residents.

6 Make a welcome basket for someone new in your church or neighborhood.

7 Help stock the shelves at your church's food pantry.

8 Make hand-made gifts for a local HIV/AIDS pantry or support group.

9 Give up one of your gifts for a child whom you know won't get much for Christmas.

10 Encourage your family to "adopt" a refugee family. Each of your family could give a gift to each of the members of the refugee family.

11 If there are people in your school or church from different ethnic groups, try to learn about that group. Why did they move to your area? What are their customs? Get someone to help you ask them about themselves.

12 Find out about immigration laws in your state. Ask a leader to help you understand them. Consider writing a letter to your state legislator. A letter from a young person makes a huge impact.

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

art by Sharon R. Rollins



Benediction

Go forth in peace,
for you have followed
the good road.
Go forth without fear,
for he who created you
made you holy,
has always protected you
and loves you as a mother.
--St. Clare of Assisi



art by Sallylynn Askins