

The Dance of Deliverance



*Worship Resources for the Creative Church-
Advent / Christmastide 2011*

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Sacred Seasons:



Creative Worship Tools for Your Church

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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: seedseditor@clearwire.net. Web address: www.seedsublishers.org. Copyright © 2011.

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A word about this packet:



art by Rebecca S. Ward

This worship packet was produced, as are all of our resources, with a great deal of love and prayer. We want you to be able to use these contents to enhance your congregation's Advent and Christmas seasons.

The theme, "The Dance of Deliverance," is somewhat explained on page 3 in "Advent Longings." We received our initial inspiration from Claire McKeever-Burgitt and Welton Gaddy, pastors at Northminster Baptist Church in Monroe, Louisiana.

We are deeply grateful for all of you who subscribe to *Sacred Seasons*, and who make use of these gifts in your worship and work. We are also grateful for the many people who contributed their work to this packet.

The beautiful cover art is by Sallylynn Askins, who created it especially for this packet, and especially for you. She also created the angel on the last page, called "Charley's Angel" because it was drawn as a gift to Charley Garrison, a pastor in Waco and longtime friend to Seeds. It is used with his permission.

Most of the other art in this packet comes from a collection of Madonna art that we have gathered over the past 11 years. The Advent liturgies, compiled by Katie Cook, Marie Curran and Deborah Harris, were

planned around the theme that Ken Sehested (a pastor in Asheville, NC) set forth in his musings on page 5, "Longings from Below."

The Advent liturgies include a series of four litanies by Rachel Hunter, who was assisted in the writing by her students at the Friends Meeting School in Rindge, NH.

The Christmas service, a gift from Mary Meadows (a minister in Oberlin, OH), was written around Mary's story.

We are also indebted to C. W. (Wally) Christian, a retired professor of theology from Baylor University, for a number of poems he allowed us to use in this packet. We think you will enjoy and be blessed by them.

We are introducing in this packet, for the first time, Keith Sanford, a psychology professor at Baylor University who has volunteered to write original songs for us. We are grateful for all of these people.

As always, 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 will help you in leading your congregation into a holy and joyous Advent and Christmas.

—Gratefully,
The Staff and Council of Stewards

Advent Longings

by Katie Cook, Marie Curran & Deborah Harris

When the folks at Seeds began thinking about our Advent theme this year, we wanted to go with an artistic theme: the art of Advent, the dance of Advent, the poetry of Advent, the drama of Advent, the music of Advent. But we somehow couldn't do more than get our toes wet, wading in those themes.

As we tried to brainstorm, we kept coming back to the darkness that seems to be lurking over the world. It's true that there has always been darkness, but there seems to be a heightened sense of corporate anxiety across our country and around the globe. Things seem to be especially messed up.

So, as we pondered these things, we couldn't separate our love of the artistic expressions of the infancy narratives from the current climate of unrest in our society, and even in our churches.

We've been told, all of our lives, how Christmas is not about receiving things. We've been taught to think about Jesus' love for us during this time. We try to balance this with the frenzy, the material demands, the demands on our time and energy. We try to slip in a little worship with our tinsel.

Charles Dickens reminds us each year, in various renderings of *A Christmas Carol*, that want is more keenly felt during the winter seasons (which is when Christmas happens in my hemisphere), and that we as Christians are especially called upon to respond to our fellow human beings during this time.

And we delight in doing just that (often promptly forgetting about those fellow human beings for the remainder of the year.)

Each year, the Christmas message brings light into our darkness, hope into our despondency.

But this year, something is different. The darkness is darker. The despondency is more like despair.

With countries in Europe about to go bankrupt and almost 50 million people in the US experiencing poverty, while corporations sit on more than 3 trillion dollars, we look around and see very little about which to "be of good cheer."

The whole world seems bathed in fear. Climate change has brought about devastating droughts, and the number of food-insecure people has reached a billion. For several years, people in the US have been losing jobs, homes, crops and livelihoods. We are forgetting how to hope.

The US political climate, borne out of this fear, has become even more ugly and waspish. We hear people say, on nationwide television, about a person with a terminal disease and without health insurance, "Let him die!"

We hear shrill voices, the voices of Empire, saying, "You don't belong here!" or "They don't belong here!" We hear, "Take care of yourself! Take care of *me!* Let *them* die!" We hear thunderous applause at the announcement of the number of executions carried out in Texas last year.

It is hard not to feel completely disenfranchised. It is hard not to feel like crawling under a table until the fear and hatred subside. We are afraid of these voices, and we are afraid of losing our own livelihoods. We scold others about defending their positions, but we, too, are afraid of losing our own footing. A worker at a local emergency assistance agency spoke of it as "the fear of Not Enough."

(How can you bring yourself to share your last



art by Rebecca S. Ward

piece of bread with someone, when you are stricken with this fear? How can we persuade ourselves that there is enough bread to share?)

We think the unrest of our world is very much like the unrest of the Roman Empire during the first century BCE. It is very much like Jerusalem in the world of ancient Mesopotamia, with the Assyrians, and then the Babylonians, advancing from the north.

We need the prophetic word as badly as they did.

We think the Advent message that we need comes from these artistic moments:

- The subversive song of Mary;
- The dance of the baby who would be called John, “leaping in his mother’s womb”;
- The poetry of the prophet Isaiah, grieving and hoping for the future of his country;
- The psalms of lament and joy,
- The prophetic words of comfort and peace for a wayward and beleaguered nation;
- The images of justice for the downtrodden and joy for those who mourn, culminating in a stable;

- The desperate theatrics of the Occupy-Wall-Street movement;
- The steadfast love of a God who would choose to dwell in the midst of a feckless humanity, in this world of darkness;
- The music of gratitude for that love, that joy, that peace, that hope.

These images are bursting with longing for God—or, if not consciously God for some people, then for new possibility, and we believe that God brings forth new possibility.

These images are longing for a creative, creating God to reframe our reality with imagination and belonging. This is something Empire cannot embody, no matter how well or poorly it behaves.

We believe the message of Advent is amazingly prophetic and beautiful, and contains real power. Our world is in desperate need to recall the messages of the prophets, past and present.

Maybe, in our comparative poverty, we will be able to hear the prophecy more clearly this year.

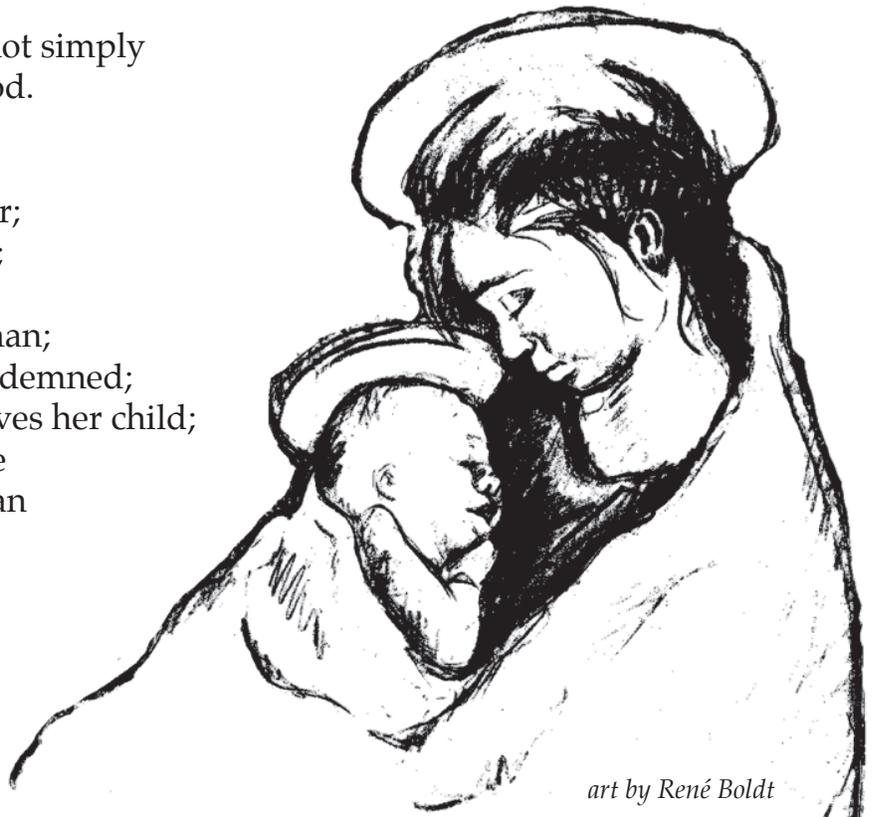
—Katie Cook is the *Seeds of Hope* editor, Marie Curran is the editorial assistant, and Deborah Harris is a member of the *Seeds Council of Stewards*.

*T*he fact is that Mary is not simply
Mary, the Mother of God.

The Mother of God is Mary,
the independent woman;
Mary, the unmarried mother;
Mary, the homeless woman;
Mary, the political refugee;
Mary, the Third World woman;
Mary, the mother of the condemned;
Mary, the widow who outlives her child;
Mary, the woman of all time
who shares in the divine plan
of salvation;

Mary, the bearer of Christ.

—Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB



art by René Boldt

Longing from Below

by Ken Sehested

Advent is a season of great longing, specifically for those longing “from below.”

The longing is a revolutionary one, however, and frightening to those in charge, who have much to lose if existing hierarchies are breached. Such anxiety is what fueled Herod’s terror against male babies.

This narrative parallels the ancient scene in Egypt when Pharaoh, sensing an internal threat, orders the Hebrew midwives to kill the baby boys. (That narrative is the first case of civil disobedience recorded in Scripture.)

Those in power long for continuity; and, given the current state of the US economy, that longing is more like an anxiety. Yet the promise is made specifically and only to “those that sit in darkness.” Both Herod, and previously Pharaoh, were terrified by this longing.

To those in power now, undocumented immigrants are the ones to fear.

The New Testament Christmas story is a story of terrorism. And the Gospel authors are clear that competing claims are being made. Here’s some background to the New Testament language surrounding Jesus’ birth, which describes the ideological conflict being played out:

We sometimes forget the backdrop to the nativity story, particularly of the great Caesar Augustus who ruled the known world. Many inscriptions describing Caesar’s divine status can still be found. There you can read about the “gospel”—literally, *euaggelia*, the same root word in Greek we Christians use when we speak of evangelism. In Rome’s imperial world, *gospel* was the good news of Caesar’s having established “peace and security for the world.”

Before Jesus, Caesar was described as “savior” who brought “salvation” to the world. Because of this, citizens were to have “faith” in their “lord.” The words “faith” and “Lord” are the same ones in the Jesus story. Elsewhere Caesar is referred to as the “redeemer” who has “saved the world” from war and established “peace on the earth.”

Do you see where this is going? Can you feel the sharp relief of those nativity stories rising

from the ornamental rendering we give them each Christmas?

The birth narratives are more than sweet lullabies. These are incendiary stories. They are bold contradictions to Roman imperial authority. No wonder Herod was troubled when the Magi told him of the birth of a new king!

All of which is to say, Advent is a dangerous season, when competing visions and loyalties go head-to-head. Jesus’ birth was considered a subversion of present arrangements. It is no less so now—though Christmas itself has been thoroughly domesticated to serve reigning economic and political purposes.

To those who now sit in the region of the shadow of death, fear not. Move on in the confidence that, should you be swallowed in some hidden crevasse, you’ll discover it’s only the fold of your Lover’s arm.

—Ken Sehested, in addition to being a liturgist and writer, is co-pastor of Circle of Mercy, a church in Asheville, NC.



art courtesy of the Franciscanos
de Cruz Blanca

Do Not Be Daunted

by Deborah E. Harris

“Do not be daunted by the enormity
of the world’s grief.

Do justly, now. Love mercy, now.

Walk humbly, now.

You are not obligated to complete the work,
but neither are you free to abandon it.”

—Adapted from the prophet Micah
and the Talmud

It happens more readily than I would like to admit. The critical mass of the world’s grief tempts me to turn away. And in the face of things like the atrocities of war and genocide, natural disasters, famine and poverty, I sometimes slip into shock and start to feel numb.

But, as the biblical prophets remind us all, we are not free to abandon the humble work of justice and mercy. People around the corner and halfway around the world are hungry, *now*. People in our neighborhoods and in struggling nations abroad are

suffering injustice, *now*. And every person I know, including me, needs forgiveness and compassion, *now*—just to make it through another day.

I marvel that an infinitely loving God, understanding the breadth and depth of human pain and longings in a way that I can never comprehend, chose simply to show up in the midst of us. To enter the world the same vulnerable way we do, through a mother’s womb. To take life day by day, developmental hurdle by hurdle. To learn a trade and mature through experience. To grow in faith and consider the call of ministry. And to simply walk the dusty roads of life, supporting people in their search for truth and healing—responding lovingly to their needs, *our* needs.

So if God’s choice for a universe overcome by fear and darkness, with all their crippling manifestations, is the simple gift of presence—of doing, loving, and walking humbly within it, then surely it can inform and inspire our own choices as we seek to follow in God’s steps.

Dearest Infant God,
Your presence among us,
yea, right here in our arms—
has opened our eyes and hearts
to the holy bliss of your infinite love;
Teach us your kind of simplicity,
and how to focus on the weightier matters;
Help us to overcome the fears
that can shut us down
and hinder our just, loving,
and merciful response
to our brothers and sisters
traveling with us on the journey each day.
We want more than anything
for our lives to be simple gifts
that bless others and honor you.
Amen

—Deborah Harris is a freelance writer and lyricist living in Waco, Texas. In addition to serving as a member of the Seeds Council of Stewards, she is the copy editor for Sacred Seasons and Hunger News & Hope.

art courtesy of the Franciscanos de Cruz Blanca



Quotes, Poems and Pithy Sayings

As often said at Christmas that Jesus is born into every family and every heart. But these “births” must not make us forget the primordial, massive fact that Jesus was born of Mary among a people that at the time were dominated by the greatest empire of the age. If we forget that fact, the birth of Jesus becomes an abstraction, a symbol, a cipher. Apart from its historical coordinates, the event loses its meaning. To the eyes of Christians, the incarnation is the irruption of God into human history: an incarnation into littleness and service in the midst of overbearing power exercised by the mighty of this world; an irruption that smells of the stable.

—Gustavo Gutierrez, *The God of Life*

A Prayer for the Numbing Season

Gracious God, I am worn out and still wearing down. But this I know: the most precious gift of Christmas has largely been given. It has been given to your beleaguered creation in Christ, your son and our salvation. Thank you for this, the ultimate gift. We accept it with joy. Amen.

—Rodney Clapp,
“The Numbing Season,” *The Christian Century*

Cough it up

Interesting how “expectation” and “expectorant” share a common Latin root. Expectation: hopeful longing, vigilant waiting, the overriding theme of Advent. Expectorant: a medicine to induce expelling mucus buildup in the lungs. In very different ways both are activities to clear the way for a fresh breath of air.

Cough it up: The message of holiday retailers to shoppers. Our economy’s strength depends on this poisonous accumulation.

Cough it up: The angels’ work orders: Prepare your hearts, clear your lungs, get ready for a Word impossible to hold with clogged lungs and cluttered hearts.

Bathe your lungs in the moist steam capable of loosening the grip of the world’s phlegm on your breath! Clear your throat. Cough it up.

The question presses a choice: Whose economy will endure? Which hunger will be satisfied?
—Ken Sehested

We have become so accustomed to the idea of divine love and of God’s coming at Christmas that we no longer feel the shiver of fear that God’s coming should arouse in us. We are indifferent to the message, taking only the pleasant and agreeable out of it and forgetting the serious aspect, that the God of the world draws near to the people of our little earth and lays claim to us. The coming of God is truly not only glad tidings, but first of all frightening news for everyone who has a conscience.

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The tamed piety of the conventional church wants an innocent baby who comes gently into our secure lives and keeps everything benign and friendly. It may be conventional and it may be tame, but it is not biblical and it is not Christian. Advent is about both hope and hurt; pain and risk, as well as excitement and joy, are part of the adventure. Christ comes touching those deep places our culture too quickly covers over with glitzy wrapping paper and “Frosty, the Snowman.”
—Kyle Childress



art by Michael Long

Week One: Longing and Hope

Note: If you have someone in your congregation who has experience with liturgical dance or interpretive movement, we suggest that you ask that person to interpret the reading from Psalms for Praying (see page 10), as someone reads it, during each Advent service.

Opening Hymn

“O Come, O Come Emmanuel”

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

Music: 15th-century French; arrangement and harmony by Thomas Helmore, 1856

Tune: VENI EMMANUEL,

Meter: LM with Refrain

Litany of Hope

ONE: In the midst of restless anxiety and depression, the people cry:

MANY: ...where is hope?

ONE: In the midst of cynicism and incredulity, the people wail:

MANY: ...where is hope?

ONE: In the throes of perpetual war, famine and strife, the people plead:

MANY: ...where is hope?

ONE: Hope is in the lilt of a familiar melody that drives you to joyful dancing in the midst of sorrow. Hope is the ability to remember light when there is darkness.

MANY: Where is hope?

ONE: Hope is an act of creation, carefully laden visions and insights, woven to create a tapestry of faith,

beautiful and elegant.

MANY: Hope is the ability to remember warmth, in frigid and icy storms.

ONE: Hope is belief magnified and intensified by pure tenacity and mindful action.

—Rachel Hunter

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Isaiah 64:1-9

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence—as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. You meet those who gladly do right, those who

remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed. We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the land of our iniquity. Yet, O Lord, you are our Creator; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people. (adapted from the NRSV)



art by Sallylynn Askins

Meditation on Longing

We come into Advent expectant.

This expectancy, this longing for God to step into life, into the human community, rises as we move along in an imperfect, pain-stricken world. We believe that God is near. Yet so many people—and, maybe for the first time, we, in this very congregation, feel abandonment, chaos and helplessness, instead of “life as usual.”

If the world sits well for you right now, surely you have heard the anxious whispers of loved ones and read of the growing, life-threatening challenges for the world’s poor.

Words float around us, and these words instill fear or resignation: “War!” “Economic Crisis!” “Famines in Africa!” “Political unrest everywhere!” “Take care of your own!”

Yet winding through this narrative of shrill panic is the ever-expectant poetry of Isaiah, the expectant poetry of our lives lived in hope. It is steady, this poetry, quiet but building, and does not withdraw in the fear of the unknown.

It is spoken in impossible circumstances but brimming with unstoppable hope and possibility that far surpasses “life as usual.” For we are the clay, and the creative, restorative work of the Potter happens and will happen. But we must hope. We must cry to God, against the cries of fear and alienation, “*Now consider, we are all your people,*” and we must wait in hope.

—Marie Curran

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

Interpretation of the Psalm

Eternal Listener, give heed to your people,
You, who are our Guide and our Light!
You, who dwell amidst the angels,
shine forth into the heart of all nations!
Enliven your people with compassion
that peace and justice might flourish.

Restore us, O Holy One;
let your face shine upon us,
teach us to love!

Gentle teacher, help us to turn
to You in prayer,
fasting from our negative thoughts.
In your steadfast love, You weep
with our tears,
tears that rise from fear,

doubt, and illusion.

You uphold us when we feel
the sting of pride
when our anxiety threatens
to paralyze us.

Restore us, O Holy One;
let your face shine upon us,
teach us to love!

(from *Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness* by Nan C. Merrill)

Reading from the Epistles

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Hymn

“Hark! A Thrilling Voice Is Sounding”

Text: Unknown author, 5th Century (*Vox clara ecce intonat*);

Translated from Latin to English

by Edward Caswall, 1849

Music: Merton (Monk),

William H. Monk, in *The Parish Choir*, 1850.

(see <http://hymntime.com/tch/htm/h/t/h/hthrillv.htm>.)

Meditation on Hope

Advent always begins with desperate hope in dangerous circumstance.

—Ken Sehested

Gospel Reading

Mark 13:24-37

Hymn

“O Promised One of Israel”

Text: Jane Parker Huber, *A Singing Faith*, 1986.

Music: from *The English Hymnal*.

Tune: FOREST GREEN CMD

Traditional English melody

Coll. and arr. by Ralph Vaughn Williams
(1872-1958)

(See *A Singing Faith* by Jane Parker Huber, 1987:
Westminster Press, Hymn #18)

Benediction

Go from this place in peace, and may the God of possibilities fill your hearts with hope.

Editor’s note: These liturgies were compiled by Katie Cook, Marie Curran and Deborah Harris. The litanies by Rachel Hunter were written with help from her writing students at the Friends Meeting School in Rindge, NH.

Litany of Annunciation

by Erin Conaway

ONE: Most, if not all of us, have never had an encounter with the angel Gabriel, but many, if not all of us, have heard the words of fear and comfort, "The Lord is with you!" We hear it echo in the songs we sing, it reverberates from the honest, desperate and joy-filled prayers we pray, and it avalanches its way into our lives through the Word, made flesh among us.

MANY: God, give us ears to hear and courage to believe your presence with us.

ONE: We know, from the example of Mary, that this statement of presence and love requires much from us—often more than we are sure we can give. Your presence brings the weight of loving our neighbor as ourselves, the joyous burden of loving you with our hearts, minds and souls, and the stumbling block of Truth that we are not our own, we are bought with a great price.

MANY: Teach us to respond to your call with Mary's words: "May it be to me according to your Word."

ONE: For we find that when we have traveled through the valley of the shadow of death with the comfort of your rod and staff, when we have dared to venture beyond our own interests to the care of our neighbors, when we have released our possessions and followed in the Way of your provision: we are blessed among women and men in ways we have never dared to dream.

MANY: Our souls magnify you, O Lord and our spirits rejoice in God, our Savior.

ALL: As we move into Advent, we await the miracle of your Incarnation, Word made flesh dwelling among us and we continue to live in the Hope, Love, Joy and Peace this miracle brings to our hearts and to our world.

—Erin Conaway is the pastor of Seventh & James Baptist Church in Waco, TX, where the Seeds of Hope ministry is housed.



Week Two: Comfort and Peace

Note: If you have someone in your congregation who has experience with liturgical dance or interpretive movement, we suggest that you ask that person to interpret the reading from Psalms for Praying (see page 13), as someone reads it, during each Advent service.

Opening Hymn

“Comfort, Comfort Ye My People”

Text: Johannes Olearius, 1671;
translated, Catherine Winkworth, 1863
Tune: PSALM 42, *Genevan Psalter*, 1551
(Baptist Hymnal,
Convention Press, 1975, Hymn#77)

Litany of Peace

ONE: We will never find peace.
MANY: Peace is a choice.

ONE: Peace is taking
deliberate strides towards
an unknown battle-field,
armed with love.

MANY: Peace lets her silent
power seep into and embrace
even the most violent
encounters.

ONE: Steadied by hope,
peace is a vehicle for travel
into the realm of God.

MANY: Peace is a journey of
tremendous fulfillment.

ONE: Peace cannot be
granted.

MANY: Peace must be
chosen.

ONE: Peace cannot be
achieved.

MANY: Peace must be
carried out.

—Rachel Hunter

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Isaiah 40:1-11

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, every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and rough places like 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."

A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades,

when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; says to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather his lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.



Meditation on Comfort

Look and listen for the path in the wilderness. The path is there; God continually creates and recreates it, and continually calls us by name, as the people of God, to walk it.

On the path, the wilderness does not go away. Instead, God brings comfort, peace and absolute creative newness in the midst of wilderness.

You who are alienated, who feel slighted, who have woken up to find yourself disenfranchised, the God of comfort speaks your name. Those of you who just can't seem to catch a break, God has more than a break.

God gives us imagination where we only found despair, a new reality where we only saw an unforgiving grid, peace where we only knew strife. Let us remember in Advent that we are given a new song to sing.

Hear the words of Isaiah, "Here is your God!" and follow it to the singing mother, the baby in the manger, the Kingdom come, God made flesh.
—Marie Curran

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

Interpretation of the Psalm

O Beloved, how gracious You are to your people;
You restore their souls time and time again.
You forgive their iniquity
when they wander far from You;
You give them new Life.

Yes, You bless them and raise up new hope;
You awaken their hearts to love.

Restore us again, O spirit of Truth;
burn us with the refining Fire of love!
We cannot live separated from You;
cast out the demons of fear, doubt, and illusion.
Revive us again, we pray,
that your people may rejoice in You!
Have compassion on your people, O Holy One,
and grant us your salvation.

Listen, O people, in the silent chapel of your heart;
and the Beloved will speak of peace to you,
to the hidden saints, to all who turn
their hearts to Love.
Surely new life is at hand for those
who reverence Love;
O, that harmony might dwell among the nations.

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace
will embrace one another.
Wisdom will spring up from the ground
and truth will look down from the sky.

Yes, the Eternal Giver will grant what is good,
and the lands will yield abundantly.

Mercy and compassion are Love's way,
and will guide our footsteps
upon the path of peace.

*(from Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness
by Nan C. Merrill)*

Reading from the Epistles

2 Peter 3:8-15a

Hymn

"There's a Voice in the Wilderness Crying"

Words: James L. Milligan

Music: Hereford (Heins), Francis D. Heins
(1878-1949).

(See <http://hymntime.com/tch/htm/t/a/v/tavitwcr.htm>.)

Meditation on Peace

"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 Söelle

Gospel Reading

Mark 1:1-8

Hymn

"All the Earth is Waiting"

Words: Alberto Taule, 1972;

Translated by Gertrude C. Suppe, 1986, alt.

Music: Alberto Taule, 1972;

Harmony by Skinner Chavez-Melo, 1988

Tune: TAULE 11 11.12 12

(The Chalice Hymnal #139)

Benediction

Go from this place in peace, and may the God of comfort and peace be with you.

Editor's note: These liturgies were compiled by Katie Cook, Marie Curran and Deborah Harris. The litanies by Rachel Hunter were written with help from her writing students at the Friends Meeting School in Rindge, NH.

Week Three: Justice and Joy

Note: If you have someone in your congregation who has experience with liturgical dance or interpretive movement, we suggest that you ask that person to interpret the reading from Psalms for Praying (see page 15,) as someone reads it, during each Advent service.

Opening Hymn

“Come You People of the Promise”

Words: Joy F. Patterson, 1994

(Hope Publishing Company: 1994)

Music: W Zlobie Lezy, Polish carol;

Arranged by Edith M. Reed

(see <http://hymntime.com/tch/htm/c/o/m/comeypop.htm>.)

Litany of Joy

ONE: A peaceful feeling of contentment interacts suddenly with a surge of hope, and the offspring is joy.

MANY: Joy drinks the bubbling and gurgling of clear fresh love.

ONE: Joy revels in the innocence of birth.

MANY: Joy’s soft blankets and fresh hot tea coat the coolness of misery.

ONE: The abrupt purring of a feisty cat is a song of joy.

MANY: Celebrating life is song of joy.

ONE: The rustling of a congregation adjusting positions in their seats is a song of joy.

MANY: Awareness of living is song of joy.

ONE: Joy crackles and smacks like a fire on a cold night,

MANY: And like a fire it spreads.

ONE: Share your delights, share your tee-hee-hees and share your ha-has.

MANY: Ha, ha, ha, ha.

ONE: Make a joyful noise unto the Lord!

MANY: Ha, ha, ha, ha—

ONE: Halleluia.

—Rachel Hunter

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing. I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the



art by John Richardson

Lord has blessed. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, and my whole being shall exult in my God; for God has clothed me with the garments of salvation, God has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations. (adapted from the NRSV)

Meditation on Justice

Take seriously and reflect on the covenant God makes with the People of God. What part do you have in this covenant? What role does your church community have? Consider Israel's joy as Isaiah's words are delivered: there is good news for the depressed, oppressed people! Your dead-end dreams, your stuck lives, your pathetic communities and struggling families, your mourning spirits are recognized and healed by the Creator and Lover of Life!

God brings justice and promise to a broken people! How insane and beautiful! What a time for a dance of thankfulness! Are you the depressed and oppressed? Or do you pour out this joyful message to the depressed and oppressed?

Perhaps both of these questions are true in your life. Perhaps, though, you have had trouble dancing because you have forgotten the seemingly foolish, startlingly joyful and renewing heart of God, so evident in the Advent narrative.

As we bring ourselves into worship with Isaiah, consider now Mary, the mother of Jesus. You know the story, but remember her position. A young peasant woman, holding no rights in her society, living in a disenfranchised nation, finding herself in a less-than-convenient situation. It is a life-threatening situation for this vulnerable Jewish teenager.

Yet she is a direct recipient of the hopeful, comforting, joyful Advent narrative. Living within "the devastations of many generations," she is touched with the crazy paradoxical joy of new possibility and healing. And if she forgets this in those difficult nine months, she is reminded every time the very Promise dances and kicks in her womb.

—Marie Curran

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 126

Interpretation of the Psalm

When the Divine Lover enters the human heart,
all yearnings are fulfilled!

Then will our mouths ring forth with laughter,

and our tongues with shouts of joy;
Then will we sing our songs of praise
to You, O Beloved of all hearts.
For gladness will radiate out for all to see;
so great is your Presence among us.

Restore us to wholeness, O Healer,
like newborn babes
who have never strayed from You!
May all who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy!
May all who go forth
weeping tears of repentance,
bearing seed for sowing,
Come home to You with shouts of joy,
leaving sorrow behind.
*(from Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness
by Nan C. Merrill)*

Reading from the Epistles

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Hymn

"When God Is a Child"

Words: Brian Wren, 1985

Music: Joan Collier Fogg, 1987

Tune: MOON BEAMS

Irr. w. refrain

(Chalice Hymnal #132)

Meditation on Joy

Let me tell you a story. A divorced mother wakes her teenager for school and he immediately starts complaining about everything she tries to do for him. She's worried that he doesn't love her any more. She doesn't know what to do about it.

Her job is terrible. She's working more hours and not getting anything done. She feels older than she wants to feel. She's worried about her mother. Her mom can still care for herself, but in five years they'll have to make some hard decisions.

On the way home from work, the woman flips on the radio. The first station is playing "Winter Wonderland." That's way too cheerful. The second station is playing the dogs barking "Jingle Bells."

She turns off the radio. She used to love December. It was her favorite time of the year. Advent was magical, but this year she just feels tired.

On Sunday, she goes to church though she isn't sure she wants to, but then she begins to sing. The hymns aren't about a holly-jolly Christmas. They're about joy that comes in the midst of sorrows and poor

shepherds out on a cold night. The choir sings about a child born into poverty and a glory that's beyond all the grief we'll ever face. This tired and broken woman slowly begins to understand that Christmas isn't about happiness, but about joy that's deeper than all of our troubles.

—Brett Younger

Reading from the Gospels

John 1:6-8; 19-28

Hymn

"Joyful Is the Dark"

Words: Brian Wren, 1989

Music: Gayle Schoepf, 1994

Tune: ORENGETHORPE 10 10.11 10

(Chalice Hymnal #332)

Benediction

Go from here today in joy, and may the God of justice guide your steps.

Editor's note: These liturgies were compiled by Katie Cook, Marie Curran and Deborah Harris. The litanies by Rachel Hunter were written with help from her writing students at the Friends Meeting School in Rindge, NH.

God Who Loves Love

by Claire K. McKeever-Burgett

God who loves love
God who is love—

In the flesh,
you come

In the midst of our lives,
you enter

In the stillness of our voices,
you speak

In the timidity of our actions,
you act

In the dances of our celebrations,
you dance
In all things, in all times—

Incarnate God
Entering God
Speaking God
Acting God
Dancing God
Loving God

At times,
too much to fathom,
understand,
accept.

Yet, in the flesh,
the entrance,
the speech,
the act,
the dance,
the love—

You show up,
sit beside,
live within,
and root below.

God who loves love
God who is love—

In all things, in all times
You draw near
And we know Love.
Amen.



*art courtesy of the
Franciscanos
de Cruz Blanca*

Week Four: Gratitude and Love

Note: If you have someone in your congregation who has experience with liturgical dance or interpretive movement, we suggest that you ask that person to interpret the reading from Psalms for Praying (see page 18), as someone reads it, during each Advent service.

Opening Hymn

“For Ages Women Hoped and Prayed”

Words: Jane Parker Huber, *A Singing Faith*, 1982.

Tune: VOX DELICTI CMD

John B. Dykes, 1868

(See *A Singing Faith*, Westminster Press: 1987, Hymn #20)

Litany of Love

ONE: We have a yearning need as poignant as hunger.

MANY: We all strive for love.

ONE: And there are countless emotions which we mistake for love.

MANY: But love is big enough to embody countless emotions.

ONE: Love is not the opposite of power; it is the antithesis.

MANY: Love provokes change in gentle strengthening.

ONE: Love eats away at evil and hatred as a passionate sculptor chips away at a formless boulder to reveal an exquisite form.

MANY: Love is the creator river composing a stunningly breathtaking canyon.

ONE: Love is the view from a canyon height encompassing everything in sight.

MANY: Love is the ability to recognize humanity even in the midst of one’s own fury.

ONE: Love is the force of eloquence in the midst of silence.

MANY: Love has the power that light has in darkness.

ONE: Love renders darkness nonexistent.

—Rachel Hunter

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Isaiah 65:17-25

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor



in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—and their descendants as well. Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.

Meditation on Gratitude

If we listen, Advent centers and redirects us: from fear, to hope. From despair, to comfort. From depression, to joy.

We are inspired to emerge from the dark places with poetry, songs and dance. Yet do not mistake all this for a mere attitude makeover. For, as any story must be, the story of Advent is transformative at its core. It challenges us, as individuals, as a people.

Responding to the cries, hopes and calls for change written in Isaiah, the events of Advent do not mutter promises to get back to “life as usual.” Advent, like any plot to a story, is not devoid of conflict, is not divorced from a complex and messy world. Soak in the imagery of the wolf and the lamb, eating together!

Listen to the whispers of the narrative, that a humble little peasant baby is coming, to be called Jesus, our God in flesh! That the perpetually hungry will eat and the abused will be restored. That the Mighty One will do great things for the lowly! Strain your mind and read between the lines of the great story: life is an act of love, love conquers all, life will conquer death, God is here, forever.

—Marie Curran

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 89:1-4; 19-26

Interpretation of the Psalm

(89:1-4, 19-37)

I will sing of your steadfast love
forever, my Beloved;
with forthright voice I will proclaim
your goodness to all generations.
For your abiding love rules the universe,
your faithfulness extends
throughout the firmament.

Your covenant from the beginning of time
encompasses all who choose
to walk the path of Love;
And to all generations that honor your Word,
will Love make itself known.

You have made yourself known

to the faith-filled;
You set them on the path of peace.
The Gift You sent to bring redemption
invites us to eternal life!
Through the Heart of all hearts,
You opened the way of Life.
Your steadfast Love came among us
giving us strength.
Fear shall not overcome us,
we will not give in to doubt.
For your love casts out our fear
and gives rise to forgiveness
of those who would do us wrong.
Yes, your faithfulness and
your abiding love are with us,
and in your name we can do
all good things.
Through You is our consciousness
lifted up,
that we might know your Will
and live it.
In our gratitude we cry out,
“You are the Beloved,
the Most High, our very Breath.”
Through you we are born anew,
The Spirit of Truth comes to us.
Your enduring love is with us forever,
and your Covenant stands firm
throughout eternity.
We will know You as Loving Companion Presence
now and in the life to come.

“If your children turn their backs
and follow not Love’s way,
If they oppress the weak and befriend injustice,
They will separate themselves from Love,
and they will dwell with fear.
Even so, my steadfast Love
will await their return,
my faithfulness will remain sure.
My Covenant stands true forever,
as does the Word that brings life.
You are all invited to holiness,
to come to the fullness of your birthright.
For Love shall endure forever, and
Light as the sun before us.
Like the stars,
they shall be established forever;
they shall stand true
while the firmament remains.”
(from *Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness*
by Nan C. Merrill)

Reading from the Epistle

Romans 16: 25-27

Hymn

“Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn”

Words and Music: Marty Haugen, 1983

Tune: REJOICE, REJOICE 98.98.87.89

(Chalice Hymnal #138)

Meditation on Love

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. This is the love that is the risk, the investment of the self that makes our living worthwhile.

—John Ballenger

Reading from the Gospel

Luke 1:26-38

Hymn

“My Soul Gives Glory to God”

Words: Miriam Therese Winter, 1978, 1987

Music: Wyeth’s *Repository of Sacred Music*, Part Second, 1813;

harm. Charles H. Webb, 1988

MORNING SONG CM

(Chalice Hymnal #130)

Benediction

Go from this place, and may the gratitude in your hearts flow out as love for all whom you encounter.

Editor’s note: These liturgies were compiled by Katie Cook, Marie Curran and Deborah Harris. The litanies by Rachel Hunter were written with help from her writing students at the Friends Meeting School in Rindge, NH.

Vigil

by C. W. Christian

(For Christmas Eve)

O, let us keep vigil,
Here, among the stars,
Here, where the winds sigh softly
And the distant horizon glows
With lanterns and with candles.

Let us keep vigil in the darkness,
In the comforting darkness,
For darkness becomes mystery.
It is the true milieu of God.

Let us keep vigil
With our senses honed
To the night sounds about us.
This is the night that
annuls the rush of time.

Listen: the wail of labor,
The mewl of life aborning.
Let us keep vigil;
It is the night of nights.

—C. W. (Wally) Christian is a retired professor of theology from Baylor University. This poem is from a collection called “Wreath of Songs for Advent and Christmastide.”



The Story of Mary

A Christmas Eve Service

by Mary T. Meadows

Poem

"The Coming of God"

(All of the poems in this service are by Ann Weems)

Introit

"Lo, How a Rose Ere Blooming"

Call to Worship

ONE: Prepare the way!

The promised Rose is coming!

MANY: The wolf shall live with the lamb,

The leopard shall lie down with the kid

And a little child shall lead them!

ONE: Prepare the way! Make straight in the
desert a highway for our God!

MANY: Every valley shall be lifted and every
mountain made low

ONE: Prepare the way!

MANY: And the glory of God shall be revealed!

(Based on Isaiah 11:1-10, 40:1-11)

Congregational Hymn

"Prepare the Way of the Lord"

(Taize chorus)

Chalice Hymnal #121

Lighting of the Christ Candle

Loving Word of God, we see the fullness of your
glory in your willingness to be one with us. May
this light remind us of your bodily presence in
our lives, that we may be your presence of grace
and truth in this world. Amen.

Congregational Hymn

(Solo on first verse)

"All Earth is Waiting"

Chalice Hymnal #139

The Visitation

READER 1: Luke 1:26-38.

MARY'S STORY

Solo

"I'll Go Tell Elizabeth"

Ken Medema

The Census

READER 1: Micah 5:1

READER 2: Luke 2:1-4

MARY'S STORY

Congregational Hymn

"O Little Town of
Bethlehem"

Chalice Hymnal #44

The Birth

READER 2:

Luke 2:5-7

Poem

"Mary, Nazareth
Girl"

MARY'S STORY

Congregational Hymn

"Away in a
Manger"

*Chalice Hymnal
#147*

The Shepherds

READER 2:

Luke 2:8-14

READER 1:

Luke 2:8-20

Poem

"Had We Been
There"



art by Susan Daily

MARY'S STORY

Congregational Hymn

"Angels We Have Heard on High"
Chalice Hymnal #155

The Wise Bring Gifts

READER 2: Matthew 2:1-5
READER 1: Matthew 2:7-11

Poem

"The Gifts of the Magi"

Congregational Hymn

"A Stable Lamp Is Lighted"
Chalice Hymnal #141

MARY'S STORY

Solo

"Hush Missus Teenage Mary"
Ken Medema

The Prophet

READER 2: Isaiah 9:2b-4, 6

Poem

"The Christmas Spirit"

Solo

"O Holy Night"

Communion

Call to the Table

Solo

"I Wonder as I Wander"

Sharing the Light

MARY'S STORY

Congregational Hymn

"Silent Night, Holy Night"
Chalice Hymnal # 145
(sung while light is shared)

Silence

Poem

"It Is Not Over"

—Mary Meadows is an ordained American Baptist Minister who has served churches as a youth minister, children's minister and pastor, although not at the same time! She currently works at her day job as an attorney in Oberlin, OH, but she dabbles in ministry at Peace Community Church when called upon. She is also the mother of now 12-year-old Rose.



Deliverance

by C. W. Christian

("...and in the fullness of time.")

Hail Mary, Daughter of Nazareth,
Full of grace
But full as well with promise,
Great with child,
Yea, rounded with a holy hope
That in your favored honor
Is incarnation.
Your child sleeps dreamlessly
Warmed by the milk of his nativity,
The softness of your bosom,
The comfort of your limpid lullaby.
Sing on! Sing softly.
Sing of green fields and morning sun
Time enough for shadows.
Time enough for dreams.

—C. W. (Wally) Christian is a retired professor of theology from Baylor University. This poem is from a collection called "Wreath of Songs for Advent and Christmastide."

Mary's Story

Christmas Eve Service (Leader's Guide)

by Mary T. Meadows

*This Christmas Eve service juxtaposes scripture (typically NRSV) with imagined reflections of Mary. It also uses poems written by Ann Weems and published in *Kneeling in Bethlehem* (available from Amazon or other bookstores; page numbers refer to the hardback edition.)*

This communion service in our small congregation typically lasts an average of an hour and 15 minutes. Our congregation keeps lights lower during the Sharing of the Light.

Typically, I have one person who plays Mary throughout the service (often in costume, entering the sanctuary at various times throughout the service. If your church "stages" the nativity during the Christmas Eve service, Mary simply becomes part of that staging).

The poems are typically read by the same person (not Mary!) throughout. The scripture passages are typically shared by two readers, as indicated.

This service is easily adjusted for your congregation's own Christmas Eve tradition and hymnal. In this version, the solos include Ken Medema's "I'll Go Tell Elizabeth" and "Hush Missus Teenage Mary." These are available online at www.kenmedema.com.

*The first song is in sheet music, the second is part of a collection, *Songs for The Turning*. Other solos listed can be found in various collections. If you don't have soloists, however, additional hymns can be substituted, as there are many additional carols that fit the readings! If you need to shorten the service, you could eliminate all or some of the poems.*

The following is the order of worship with notes and narrations.

Poem

"The Coming of God"
(Ann Weems, p. 13)

Introit

"Lo, How a Rose Ere Blooming"
(solo or instrumental)

Call to Worship

ONE: Prepare the way! The promised Rose is coming!

MANY: The wolf shall live with the lamb,
The leopard shall lie down with the kid
And a little child shall lead them!

ONE: Prepare the way! Make straight in the desert
a highway for our God!

MANY: Every valley shall be lifted and every
mountain made low

ONE: Prepare the way!

MANY: And the glory of God shall be revealed!
(Based loosely on Isaiah 11:1-10, 40:1-11)

Congregational Hymn

"Prepare the Way of the Lord" (Taize chorus)
Chalice Hymnal # 121

Lighting of the Christ Candle

Loving Word of God, we see the fullness of your
glory in your willingness to be one with us. May
this light remind us of your bodily presence in our
lives, that we may be your presence of grace and
truth in this world. Amen.

Congregational Hymn

(Solo on first verse)
"All Earth is Waiting"
Chalice Hymnal #139

The Visitation

READER 1: Luke 1:26-38.

MARY: (ENTER) (*Wondering, worried, dazed*) A
baby. I'm to have a baby. I'm only 15! How will I
explain *this* to my parents?! Sure, when the angel
told me, there was a moment when I could almost
glimpse God's vision—lifting the lowly—filling
the hungry with good things—but how will I tell
my parents?! Joseph? (*Pause*) I think I need to cry.
(EXIT)

Solo

"I'll Go Tell Elizabeth"
Ken Medema
(www.kenmedema.com)

The Census

READER 1: Micah 5:1
READER 2: Luke 2:1-4
MARY:(ENTER) (*Ranting*). I can't believe it! I'm eight and a half months pregnant and *he* says we have to go to Bethlehem. Bethlehem! What's in Bethlehem? With our luck, the inns will be full of all kinds of people coming to Bethlehem for the census. I just hope I don't go into labor in the middle of that crowd! Of course, Elizabeth says I really shouldn't be riding on a donkey in my condition... (*Ad lib. on EXIT to other side.*)

Congregational Hymn

"O Little Town of Bethlehem"
Chalice Hymnal #44

The Birth

READER 2: Luke 2:5-7

Poem

"Mary, Nazareth Girl"
(Ann Weems, p. 25)

MARY:(*From within the "stable"*) So we're in a stable. (*Looks around, dubious*) At least it's dry. And quiet. It was nice of the innkeeper to find us a spot away from all those people! At least we shouldn't have any visitors here.

Congregational Hymn

Away in a Manger
Chalice Hymnal #147

The Shepherds

READER 2: Luke 2:8-14
READER 1: Luke 2:8-20

Poem

"Had We Been There"
(Ann Weems, p. 36)
MARY:(*Perhaps sitting on the stage, with baby in arms.*) Did you see those shepherds? They told me that a huge crowd of angels came to them, telling them about the baby—*my* baby. They even told them about the swaddling cloths! The shepherds didn't waste any time getting here; they left their sheep and came running. And now

they've seen the child and left. They couldn't stop praising God. I don't quite understand why angels told shepherds of all people about the baby. But nothing about this baby quite makes sense. I wonder...

Congregational Hymn

"Angels We Have Heard on High"
Chalice Hymnal #155

The Wise Bring Gifts

READER 2: Matthew 2:1-5
READER 1: Matthew 2:7-11

Poem

"The Gifts of the Magi"
Ann Weems, p. 68

Congregational Hymn

"A Stable Lamp is Lighted"
Chalice Hymnal #141

MARY:Gold, frankincense and myrrh? What odd gifts these strange magi have brought. And yet, somehow, the gifts seem appropriate. This child seems destined for something beyond this moment in a stable. God seems to have given this child to us for a reason. But it worries me. He's just a baby! Why do I want to cry?

Solo

"Hush Missus Teenage Mary"
Ken Medema (www.kenmedema.com)

The Prophet

READER 2: Isaiah 9:2b-4, 6

Poem

"The Christmas Spirit"
(Ann Weems, p. 51)

Solo

"O Holy Night"

Communion

Introduction to communion by pastors

Solo

"I Wonder as I Wander" (unaccompanied)

Sharing the Light

MARY:(*Again holding baby, but this time walking to the Christ candle*) This is the child that has come to be the light in our darkness. (*Takes candle and*

draws light from Christ candle—holds it up). This is the light of the world and we are called to be the lightbearers (*start down the aisle, lighting candles*). Hold the light to the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it. (*Exit at the back*)

Congregational Hymn

“Silent Night, Holy Night”

Chalice Hymnal #145

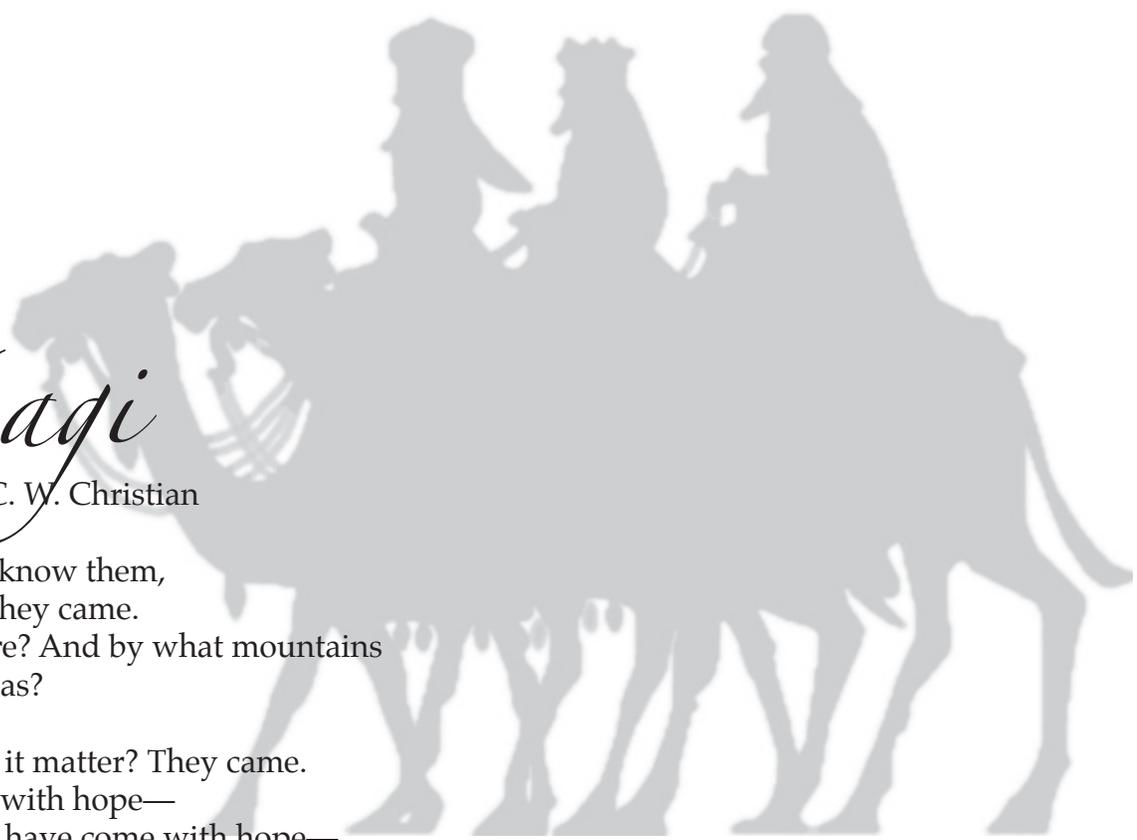
(sung while light is shared)

Silence

Poem

“It Is Not Over” (Ann Weems, p. 85)

—*Mary Meadows is an ordained American Baptist Minister who has served churches as a youth minister, children’s minister and pastor, although not at the same time! She currently works at her day job as an attorney in Oberlin, OH, but she dabbles in ministry at Peace Community Church when called upon. She is also the mother of now 12-year-old Rose.*



Magi

by C. W. Christian

We do not know them,
Only that they came.
From where? And by what mountains
Or what seas?

What does it matter? They came.
With gifts, with hope—
They must have come with hope—
But for what benison?
And then they went away.

What did they remember?
Did they know the sacrament of God
Lay naked there before them?
Did they sense the mystery deep hidden in a child?
Did they burn with joy thereafter?
Or did they wonder why?

—*C. W. (Wally) Christian is a retired professor of theology from Baylor University. This poem is from a collection called “Wreath of Songs for Advent and Christmastide.*

Music for Epiphany

Rising Star

Keith Sanford

D min G min F B \flat C G min

Where is the child who brings hope for
 Where is the child who is poor and
 Where is the child who is soft - ly

D min G min D min E A

5 peo - ple? We saw a ris - ing
 thirs - ty? We saw a ris - ing
 call - ing? We saw a ris - ing

D min C B \flat G min A maj

9 star and have come to wor - ship.
 star and have come to wor - ship.
 star and have come to wor - ship.

D min C F G min

13 Is it too late to save this world from
 May - be our hands can give some shel - ter or
 Where are the peo - ple who in won - der re -

A min7 D min D min C

17 ang - uish? Or, could a star give
 com - fort. May - be our eyes can
 spond - ing, fol - low a star of

F C A min D min

21 hope for God dwell - ing with us?
 see now God dwell - ing with us.
 hope for God dwell - ing with us?

—Keith Sanford is a professor of psychology at Baylor University in Waco, TX. He plans to create a page on his website (www.sanfordspace.com) for songs that he has created for Sacred Seasons readers. Watch on the Seeds website and Facebook page for the link.

Benediction



art by Sallylynn Askins

"Almighty God, are you true?"
When you are standing up to your neck in darkness,
how do you say yes to that question?
You say yes, I suppose the only way faith can every say it,
if it is honest with itself.
You say yes with your fingers crossed.
You say it with your heart in your mouth.
Maybe that way we can say yes.

He visited us.
The world has never been quite the same.
It is still a very dark world,
in some ways darker than ever before,
but the darkness is different
because he keeps getting born into it.

—Frederick Buechner, *The Clown in the Belfry*