

# Waiting in Wonder



**Worship Resources for the Creative Church—Advent & Christmastide 2009**

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# Sacred Seasons:



## Creative Worship Tools for Your Church

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### Editorial Address

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# Waiting in Wonder

## In this worship packet:

- 3 Theme Interpretation
- 4 Week 1: *The Wonder of Hope*
- 5 New Lyrics: *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*
- 6 Nested Meditation: *What If?*
- 7 Poem: *Annunciation*
- 8 Litany: *I Am Waiting*
- 9 Meditation: *I Have Just Enough*
- 10 Poem: *Herod's Wait, Part 1*
- 11 Week 2: *The Wonder of Peace*
- 12 Poem: *Watching Second Graders from Saint Alphonsus Parish School*
- 13 Meditation: *Singing a Song of Salvation*
- 14 Poem: *Herod's Wait, Part 2*
- 15 Week 3: *The Wonder of Joy*
- 16 Poem: *Children of the World*
- 17 Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings
- 18 Poem: *Herod's Wait, Part 3*
- 19 Week 4: *The Wonder of Love*
- 20 Poem: *How Can She Sing?*
- 21 Meditation: *Spontaneous Community*
- 22 Poem: *Love's Cradle*
- 23 Poem: *Herod's Wait, Part 4*
- 24 Nested Meditation: *It Doesn't Matter*
- 25 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, and, we confess, a certain amount of obsession. We want you to be able to use these contents to enhance your congregation's Advent experience while keeping their eyes focused on our true mission.

The art for this issue was all created by Helen Siegl and Gertrud Mueller Nelson. The cover art is by Helen Siegl.

Much of the writing in this issue was contributed by members of Lake Shore Baptist Church in Waco, Texas. It was originally produced for the 2008 LSBC Advent meditation booklet on the theme of the Magnificat. We are indebted to Sharlande Sledge, LSBC Associate Pastor, for sharing these writings and some of her own from her book, *Litanies and Prayers for the Christian Seasons*. You will also find works from our most generous poets, David Sparenberg in Seattle, WA, and Cameron Watts in Aylmer, ON. Cam created a four-part poem, *Herod's Wait*, especially for you.

As always, we have tried to pull together worship resources and information to help you lead your congregation in responding to this crisis with hope and creativity. The material in this packet is your congregation's to use freely and share with others as the need arises. May we together bring the news of God's extravagant love to a world of fear and struggle. May we together find ways of creating abundance for those who live in scarcity. —*Gratefully, The Staff and Council of Stewards*

# Theme Interpretation



*art by Helen Siegl*

**I am waiting for a rebirth of wonder,**

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

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

I am waiting to get some intimations of immortality  
by recollecting my early childhood  
and I am waiting for the green mornings  
to come again...

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

—*Lawrence Ferlinghetti*

# Week 1: The Wonder of Hope

**The days are surely coming,**  
says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise  
I made to the house of Israel  
and the house of Judah.  
In those days and at that time I will cause  
a righteous Branch to spring up for David;  
and he shall execute justice  
and righteousness in the land.  
In those days Judah will be saved and  
Jerusalem will live in safety.  
And this is the name by which  
it will be called:  
“The LORD is our righteousness.”  
—Jeremiah 33:14-16

## ***Lectionary Texts:***

Jeremiah 33:14-16  
Psalm 25:1-10  
1 Thessalonians 3:9-13  
Luke 21:25-36



*art by Gertrud Mueller Nelson*

*Because this is all yet to be—  
because God is not finished yet—  
because the story is still being written—  
we anticipate.  
It is our hope.  
It is our prayer.  
—John S. Ballenger*

*The quote above is from “Bring Your Hands Together: An Advent Meditation in Lessons and Carols for Nine Voices, Instrumentalists, Soloists and Choir in Three Acts for Christmas Eve” by John S. Ballenger, published in Sacred Seasons, Advent 1999: “Preparing the Way.”*

# O Come, O Come Emmanuel

## *New Lyrics to an Old Hymn*

by Ken Sehested

### **O come, thou fount of Mercy, come**

And light the path of journey home  
From Pharaoh's chains grant liberty  
From Herod's rage, confirm thy guarantee  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel!

O come, thou Watchful Keeper, bestow  
Glad heart, warm home to creatures below  
Give cloud by day and fire by night  
Guide feet in peace with heaven's delight  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel!

Secure the lamb, the wolf no longer preys  
Secure the child, no fear displays  
The vow of vengeance bound evermore  
God's holy mountain safe and adored  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel!

Arise, you fear-confounded, attest  
With Insurrection's voice confess

Though death's confine and terror's darkest threat  
Now govern earth's refrain...and yet  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel!

O spring, from Jesse's root, the ransom flower  
From Mary's womb, annunciating power  
Bend low you hills, arise you prostrate plain  
All flesh shall see, all lips join in refrain:  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel!

O come, announce the Blessed Manger's reach  
All Herod-hearted, murd'rous plans impeach  
Abolish every proud and cruel throne  
Fill hungry hearts, guide every exile home.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel!

*—Ken Sehested is co-pastor of the Circle of Mercy Fellowship in Asheville, North Carolina. His new book, In the Land of the Living: Prayers Personal and Public (Catwaba Publishing), is a collection of his exquisite liturgical poetry.*



*art by Helen Siegl*



*art by Gertrud Mueller Nelson*

# **What if?**

## ***A Nested Meditation***

by Sharon R. Rollins

What if?

What if there were no light?

What? If there were no light in the world?

What if there were no light in the world;  
How could we manage hope?

What if there were no light in the world?  
How could we manage?  
Hope and light return with Advent.

*— Sharon Rollins is a therapist and artist in Waco, Texas. She borrowed the style of “nested meditations” from Kevin Anderson’s Divinity in Disguise.*

# Annunciation

by Ken Sehested

## **Hail, O favored one!**

But Mary was greatly troubled  
at the angel's erupting, interrupting greeting.  
No wonder.

The annunciation of heaven  
splitting earth is always  
troubling, trembling, tremulous.  
Mountains shake, hearts quiver  
at the sound of God's rousing.

No wonder.

Such announcements stir dangerous memory:  
the crumbling of ambition,  
quakes rending high places,  
saviors emerging from mangers  
to subvert palaces and princes and priests.

Hail, O favored one!

Heaven's comedy breaks with a grin:  
into the womb of a teenage peasant,  
to shepherds standing in dung-filled fields,  
to goyim—refuse of creation—from distant lands  
who decipher God's signature in the very stars.

With Mary, Herod also shudders,  
gripped with fear,  
at the sound of this heavenly Hail!  
His heart, too, is  
troubled, trembling, tremulous.  
But Herod-hearts  
cast slaughtered innocents  
in their wake.

Only those with wombs of welcome  
to heaven's Annunciation  
can magnify God and heal the earth.

—Ken Sehested is co-pastor of the Circle of Mercy Fellowship  
in Asheville, North Carolina. His new book, *In the Land  
of the Living: Prayers Personal and Public* (Catwaba  
Publishing), is a collection of his exquisite liturgical poetry.

*art by Helen Siegl*



# I Am Waiting

## A Litany for the Beginning of Advent

by Brett Younger

FIRST READER: Advent begins with darkness. These weeks remind us  
that we are perpetually hoping for the dawn.

SECOND READER: Fear, hunger, emptiness, and lostness cover the earth.

THIRD READER: Those who recognize the darkness are waiting for a light.

FIRST READER: I am waiting for the moment when I become the person  
I keep thinking I should be,

PEOPLE: And I am waiting to feel no need for the approval of others.

SECOND READER: I am waiting to truly want the needy to have what I grudgingly give,

PEOPLE: And I am waiting to love other children with the love I have for my own.

THIRD READER: I am waiting for the church of Jesus Christ to act like Jesus Christ,

PEOPLE: And I am waiting to be the  
person I imagine God thinks I  
should be.

FIRST READER: I am awaiting  
perpetually and forever a light that  
shines in the darkness.

SECOND READER: The promise of  
that for which we wait comes with  
Christmas.

THIRD READER: The hope we need  
is born. The acceptance we desire is  
given.

ALL: The light shines in the  
darkness and the darkness will not  
overcome it.

*— Adapted from a meditation by Brett  
Younger, professor of homiletics at McAfee  
Theological Seminary in Atlanta, Georgia.  
The meditation was inspired by a Lawrence  
Ferlinghetti poem (see page 3).*



art by Gertrud Mueller Nelson



# I Have Just Enough

by Charles Conkin

Text: Jeremiah 33:14-6; Luke 1:46-55

“I have just enough.” We have all heard this phrase repeated on news channels and radio stations recounting how the downward turn of the economy is affecting lives.

These words have occupied my thoughts and reflections since the economy began to fall. My hope for this Advent season is that I can embrace what it means to “have just enough.”

After hours of focusing on these words I believe they hold a different meaning than media writers attribute to them.

I am not trying to increase my salary by saying finances are tight. I am not trying to indicate I am barely surviving and living paycheck to paycheck. I have just enough. It seems like a negative phrase but I do not think of it that way.

This is a celebration—a celebration because of the ability I have for the first time in my life to give to others in need. My whole life until now has been one of either dependence on others or of financial uncertainty.

As a child, I depended on my parents for food and shelter. As I grew, it was my parents who bought my first car and gas for it. When I traveled to college, it was only the gifts of family members that made my education possible.

In graduate school, I worked low paying, part-time jobs and lived with other students to cut costs. It is a celebration to finally say, “I have just enough.” I have come to this place in my life where I am comfortable.

But this is an uneasy feeling, since so many people are not. I read the words of Mary, look at the life of Jesus and realize God is working on the side of the poor.

## The Myth of Scarcity

The current financial crisis in the United States has only opened our eyes to the circulating myth that there is not enough to go around. The problem is not that there is not enough, but rather the ones who do have continue to hoard for themselves.

We have been conned into believing that our needs will not be met. This leads us to let anxiety overwhelm our lives. When we are in need, we grab as much as our basket will hold. Walter Brueggemann calls this “the myth of scarcity.” We do not live as if we have just

enough. We live to store up treasures on this earth.

We believe that there is not enough food, oil or products for everyone. For some people this is a reality, but a reality only because all of their needs are sitting in our storehouses. We placed our treasure in the wrong place and our hearts followed. Jesus said, “You cannot serve God and Mammon.” However, we place a great value on the “stuff” in our lives.

## The God of Abundance

During this Advent season, let us remember that the God of abundance lives. How do we know? We know because, throughout salvation history, God is lifting up the lowly and guiding them to better places.

We see this truth from the exodus to the promised land, from salvation after exile back to Israel, and we see it in the Incarnation. God taking on human form;

**We placed our  
treasure in the wrong  
place and our hearts  
followed.**

this is the fullness of God’s love for us. The life of Christ is the abundance of God made visible to us. It is also Christ who carries out the work of God to lift up the lowly.

My soul magnifies the Lord when I see the God of abundance working in the lives of others who believe there is enough food for everyone to sit at the table. My soul magnifies the Lord when my treasure reflects the feelings of my heart, when I truly believe the Prince of Peace transforms the lives of the hungry.

Or my soul magnifies the Lord when I begin to recite in my heart that “I have just enough” and fully understand all of what those words can mean.

—Charles Conkin is minister to youth at Lake Shore Baptist Church in Waco, Texas. Since moving to Texas a few years ago to attend George W. Truett Theological Seminary in Waco, Charles has become deeply involved in ministries to people in need in his community. Art on this page is by Helen Siegl.



art by Helen Siegl

# Herod's Wait, Part 1

by Cameron Watts

*I am a Jew, not*  
by birth but  
by circumcision and I choose to  
lead these Jews  
into prosperity so I offer  
hope a temple a second great  
Temple.  
Say it loud! Temple! TEMPLE!  
The word echoes through my  
colonnades and reverberates off marble  
Hand quarried marble  
My Hope is built on nothing less  
than the backs of my  
subjects.  
Odd how they do not see  
the hope they  
build.  
And when  
it is finished  
Masada beckons.

—Cam Watts is the pastor of Aylmer Baptist Church, Aylmer Ontario. His award-winning poems have appeared in a number of Seeds publications. He wrote the four-stanza poem “Herod’s Wait” especially for this issue of Sacred Seasons.

# Week 2: The Wonder of Peace

## Then [John's] father Zechariah

was filled with the Holy Spirit  
and spoke this prophecy:

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
for he has looked favorably on his people  
and redeemed them.

He has raised up a mighty savior for us  
in the house of his servant David,  
as he spoke through the mouth  
of his holy prophets from of old,  
that we would be saved from our enemies  
and from the hand of all who hate us.  
Thus he has shown the mercy promised  
to our ancestors, and has remembered  
his holy covenant,  
the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham,  
to grant us that we,  
being rescued from the hands of our enemies,  
might serve him without fear,  
in holiness and righteousness before him  
all our days.

And you, child, will be called  
the prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,  
to give knowledge of salvation to his people  
by the forgiveness of their sins.

By the tender mercy of our God,  
the dawn from on high will break  
to give light to those who sit in darkness  
and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace  
—Luke 1:67-79

## Lectionary Texts:

Malachi 3:1-4 or Baruch 5:1-9

Luke 1:68-79

Philippians 1:3-11

Luke 3:1-6

*With you,  
let us imagine the world at peace.  
With you,  
let us imagine our purpose  
at one with yours.  
Oh, God, let all our imaginings  
be not merely dreams  
but the beginning of our moving  
in the world with you.*

*Imagine with us, God.*

*Imagine.*

*Imagine.*

—Sharlande Sledge



*art by Gertrud Mueller Nelson*

—The quote above is from *Prayers and Litanies for the Christian Seasons* (Smyth & Helwys 1999)

# Watching Second Graders from Saint Alphonsus Parish School

by David Sparenberg

**Look after tomorrow, Lord, tomorrow.**

While I, for one, cry out for today. Many are sickened, having our children tossed like dirt into the tempests of time, scissored and scythed to slaughter.

Pour love of the Sacred Heart-heart of life-into our suffering and frightened hearts. Give us,

throughout this world of rags and blood, one whole Earth over, courage to rise up and stand in union; courage and heroic humility; to denounce idols of violence, to change the culture of greed, to end—by voting from power—the politics and purveyors of terror and war.

Look as I do, you others, with tender eyes upon tender faces of school children—every one unique, all equally human, each of these lovely with promises of life. Remember

like stone jars that must be broken for waters within to freely run....  
Remember

you tight knotted men at arms, how, before you twisted your souls to hardness and blamed distrust on similar strangers, light shone within, and you smelled as children smell, of honeysuckle—joy and lavender-and holiness, and laughter. Remember

you mothers of daughters and little men, the blood you shed that these innocent gifts could enter the sanctuary of life—the living circle. End the history of madness and murder. Show reverence all. Walk in the way of respect.

Look after tomorrow, Lord, tomorrow. While I today, 'mid multitudes, make You our family prayer, and together we pray for peace.

—David Sparenberg—a playwright, poet, storyteller, stage director, Shakespearean actor and novelist—works in Seattle. He uses his craft to help people cope with life-threatening illness and loss.



art by Helen Siegl

art by Helen Siegl

# Singing a Song of Salvation

by Meredith Holladay

Texts: Luke 1:39-55, 67-79, Matthew 3:1-6

**B**aptist Pastor Cam Watts, in reflecting on the Advent season, is quoted as saying:

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

Talk about the unexpected.

Then again, why should we expect anything otherwise? Through the Hebrew scriptures, we find examples of the most unsuspecting and unsuspected persons speaking truth in the face of all that is not true,

be assured of God's faithfulness in the face of all that is mighty and unfaithful. We need to know how to be human again.

So why Mary? I doubt that I need to remind you of all that made Mary as a messenger of God (with arguably the most important *message* of all) a completely preposterous idea. Our God—from *this* girl. But here she is...singing her song.

She joins her voice in the chorus of the prophets and the gospels—the song that reminds us that apparently failed promises are being kept just when we thought they were abandoned.

The future proclaimed in her song, in all the singing surrounding the otherwise quiet, swaddling incarnation of God, is that singing will be possible again.

She sings the song and then brings to life a complete reversal of our expectations: we expect a mighty, dominant force bringing utter and immediate change: we receive a teacher, humble and tortured.

We must sing. We must sing, with Mary, a song of hope and of liberation. And we all must sing the song—to remember ourselves into the covenant of God that will maintain us. And we must allow the songs to transform us—continually singing a new song to God.

Complacency has never led to change, and waiting for others to go to work leaves the whole world idle. Hoping for someone else to speak out of the wilderness, to challenge the gross injustices of the world, will leave us all in eerie silence.

As Christmas approaches and we await the world made new, we remember the birth that happened unnoticed and continues to catch us off guard. But let this year be the year we break the silence; let this year be the year we sing our song of salvation; let this year be the year we sing along with the prophets, along with Mary, the song of justice and liberation, the song "in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise God has made to our ancestors, to Abraham and his descendants forever."

—Meredith Holladay is a doctoral student in Church-State Studies at Baylor University. She is a member of Lake Shore Baptist Church in Waco, Texas.

art by Gertrud Mueller Nelson



**We could use a voice crying out in the wilderness, reminding us who we are and from whence we came.**

of justice in all that is not just, and of what is holy in all that is not.

We could use a little of that right now.

We could use a voice crying out in the wilderness, reminding us who we are and from whence we came. We need someone to help us name our fears and terrors, that we might confront them, that we might



art by Helen Siegl

# Herod's Wait, Part 2

by Cameron Watts

***P*ence is negotiated as**

a fine  
balance

it has a Roman name—

Pax.

Pax, a rough  
word on the tongue  
Pax, full of too many  
meanings

Whose pax? Antony Octavian the Senators the Maccabees?

I could go mad keeping all  
these peacemakers peaceable.

Pax is not hard to keep as  
no one

has ever kept it.

It slides  
through the fingers like the dust of  
Sinai.

—Cam Watts is the pastor of Aylmer Baptist Church, Aylmer Ontario. His award-winning poems have appeared in a number of Seeds publications. He wrote the four-stanza poem “Herod’s Wait” especially for this issue of Sacred Seasons.

# Week 3: The Wonder of Joy

## **Surely God is my salvation;**

I will trust,  
and will not be afraid,  
for the LORD GOD is my strength  
and my might;  
God has become my salvation.  
With joy you will draw water  
from the wells of salvation.  
And you will say in that day:  
Give thanks to the LORD,  
call on his name; make known God's deeds  
among the nations;  
proclaim that God's name is exalted.  
Sing praises to the LORD,  
for he has done gloriously;  
let this be known in all the earth.  
Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion,  
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.  
—Isaiah 12:2-6

*If happiness is what we feel when we think we've got what we want, then joy is what we feel when we discover we already have what we most need.*

*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 loves 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, to bind our broken hearts, to carry us when we're tired and weary.*

—Brett Younger

## **Lectionary Texts:**

Zephaniah 3:14-20  
Isaiah 12:2-6  
Philippians 4:4-7  
Luke 3:7-18



*art by Gertrud Mueller Nelson*

—The quote above is from "The Gift of Love," a sermon printed in Sacred Seasons, Advent 2008, "Extravagant Love."

# Children of the World

by David Sparenberg

## *In Japan*

there is a beautiful girl child  
more lovely than a dream  
who will grow up in the shadow  
of the nightmare of Hiroshima.

In Rwanda  
is a small boy, fed  
on hunger by hands of murder  
who smiles with a messiah's smile.

In Bosnia  
where the craters of genocide  
still reek of death and  
lingering ghosts at night can be heard  
accusing the living of atrocities, and cry  
runs a kid who runs  
with speed of the wind.

In a barrio in Mexico City  
where poverty and street crime  
are as thick as pollution  
is born the son of a humble Maria  
who shines with brilliance  
of a new day sun.

In Germany  
lives a Dresden-girl; in Poland  
an Auschwitz-boy. In  
Israel is an elder  
whose childhood was a soulless horror; whose  
memories are  
the chimneys of hell.

And I am here  
a prophet without prophecy; father  
of a wounded, unanswered prayer.  
From whence  
can answer come?  
Earth waits for Heaven and  
Heaven  
waits for us....



art by Helen Siegl

—David Sparenberg—a playwright, poet, storyteller, stage director, Shakespearean actor and novelist—works in Seattle. He uses his craft to help people cope with life-threatening illness and loss.



# Quotes, Poems & Witty Sayings

## **A prison cell, in which one waits,**

hopes, does various unessential things, and is completely dependent on the fact that the door of freedom has to be opened from the outside, is not a bad picture of Advent.

—*Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Letters and Papers from Prison

What keeps the wild hope of Christmas alive year after year in a world notorious for dashing all hopes is the haunting dream that the child who was born that day may yet be born again even in us and our own snowbound, snowblind longing for him.

—*Frederick Buechner*

True hope dwells on the possible, even when life seems to be a plot written by someone who wants to see how much adversity we can overcome.

—*Walter Anderson*

Hope begins in the dark, the stubborn hope that if you just show up and try to do the right thing, the dawn will come. You wait and watch and work: you don't give up.

—*Anne Lamott*, Bird by Bird

Hope is the thing with feathers \_  
That perches in the soul,  
\_And sings the tune—without the words, \_  
And never stops at all,

—*Emily Dickinson*

The incarnation is the glory of God that the angels sing.  
It is the power of God at work in the miracles.  
It is the wisdom of God informing the parables.  
It is the truth of God in the sayings of Jesus.  
It is the love of God in the relationships Jesus makes.  
It is the justice of God in the teaching of Jesus.  
It is the transcendence of God even in human form.  
Immanuel is "God with us."  
Thanks be to God.

The incarnation is the glory of God wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. It is the power of God made vulnerable. It is the wisdom of God shared at the dinner table over bread and wine.

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

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

It is the immanence of God even in human form. Immanuel is "God with us."

Thanks be to God.

—*John S. Ballenger*, from "Bring Your Hands Together: An Advent Meditation in Lessons and Carols for Nine Voices, Instrumentalists, Soloists and Choir in Three Acts for Christmas Eve.", published in Sacred Seasons, Advent 1999, "Preparing the Way."

How silently,  
how silently,  
your wondrous gifts are given.

We would be silent now, Lord,  
and expectant  
that we may receive  
the gifts we need,  
so we may become  
the gifts others need.

—*Sharlande Sledge*,

—The quote above is from Prayers and Litanies for the Christian Seasons (Smyth & Helwys 1999)



art by Gertrud Mueller Nelson



art by Helen Siegl

# Herod's Wait, Part 3

by Cameron Watts

**God save me from enger**  
religious fools  
cloaked  
in mystery and misery  
misers who do not spend on themselves  
except for some longed-for ruler  
found in an omen.  
I would rule  
them and relieve them of  
their burdens  
of wealth and expectation and what else  
what  
what are they saving themselves for  
these aged virgins who know all  
and yet do not know joy  
Joy is having them come to my throne  
and seeking my wisdom  
and leave to be astronomers  
in my land  
Old Magi can not  
Jump  
can they?

—Cam Watts is the pastor of Aylmer Baptist Church, Aylmer Ontario. His award-winning poems have appeared in a number of Seeds publications. He wrote the four-stanza poem "Herod's Wait" especially for this issue of Sacred Seasons.

# Week 4: The Wonder of Love

**"My soul magnifies the Lord,**

and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has looked with favor  
on the lowliness of his servant.  
Surely, from now on all generations  
will call me blessed;  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.  
God's mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
God has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud  
in the thoughts of their hearts.  
God has brought down the powerful from their  
thrones, and lifted up the lowly;  
God has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.  
God has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."  
—Luke 1:46b-55

*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.*

—John S. Ballenger

## **Lectionary Texts:**

Micah 5:2-5a  
Luke 1:46b-55 or Psalm 80:1-7  
Hebrews 10:5-10  
Luke 1:39-45, (46-55)



art by Gertrud Mueller Nelson

—The quote above is from "Love, a meditation printed in Sacred Seasons, Advent 1999, "The Word Made Flesh."

# How Can She Sing?

by Chris Brennan Homiak

Text: Luke 1:39-55

## How can she sing?

the city is threatening to condemn her house,  
freshly painted with love  
the house she has pieced together from scraps  
and lived in for the last ten years.

How can she sing?

they are without papers in a foreign land.

How can she sing?

she cannot afford medicine for her son's epilepsy,  
nor technology to help him hear all he cannot see.

How can she sing?

she has no husband nor children who can work.

How can she sing?

last week their telephone service was cut off.

How can she sing?

the immigration judge in texas is asking  
to see the woman who cut the umbilical cord  
over twenty years ago  
to prove the son was born an American.

How can she sing?

the powerful remain in their thrones,  
the rich remain full,  
and so often she is sent away empty.

How can she sing?

despairing, she shared:  
"Si tengo café, no tengo azúcar.

Si tengo azúcar, no tengo café!"

How can she sing?

her favorite (and most financially helpful)  
social worker is moving away.

How can she sing?

again and again,  
she says "esperamos":  
we are waiting, we are hoping.

How can she sing?

when I greet her, "Como esta?"  
she always replies, "Bien, gracias a Dios!"

How can she sing?

in the middle of a meeting about their future  
seemingly barren of hope,  
she breaks into song,  
raises her hands,  
and sings of her trust in God.



art by Helen Siegl

—Chris Homiak is Pastor of Movement Groups and Service Teams at Revolution United Methodist Church in Kansas City, MO. He and his partner Katie live near Cherith Brook, a new community and house of hospitality.

# Spontaneous Community

by Charles Conkin

Text: Luke 1:46-55

**A** week before Thanksgiving last year, I found myself sitting in the waiting area at Caritas of Waco, an emergency assistance agency in Waco, where I live. If you have ever had to spend time in a waiting room like that one, you know that the day seems to pass by slowly.

The number of people needing assistance seemed to outnumber the hours of the day, and, as the clock ticked down, I realized that waiting was all I would accomplish that day. I had forgotten the book I meant to bring, and I quickly read through the two magazines meant to be shared among the multitude of people in the waiting room.

However, I soon became glad that I did not have a source to help my mind and senses to retreat from where I was. I began to see an idea, one that many of us believe in, become a reality.

**I saw the place Christ had envisioned of an upside-down transformation—the one that Mary holds in her song for the Lord.**

I saw community happen. It was spontaneous but authentic. It held true relationships that sometimes we only see in life-long friends. We often set aside special places for relationships in our lives, places for family members or childhood friends.

But what I saw was the opening of hearts to the needs of others who were not so familiar. A place full of the restless transformed into a scene not unlike a high-school reunion or Thanksgiving dinner. It was a place of freedom to be oneself.

I watched as people who had, at first, guarded their feelings and personal information from the receptionist, became transparent to the fellow travelers seated next to them. Facial expressions of indifference became bright with laughter when anyone told a joke.

And I saw action. I saw several people get up from their seats to race after a 16-month-old girl who was trying her hardest to escape while her mother held her newborn brother.

I saw people, who were full of life experience, share hopes and dreams for the coming year with complete

strangers. I saw the faces of weary people light up with joy as two young brothers chased each other around the room and made friends with everyone they (literally) ran into. I saw generosity in people who allowed those with greater needs to skip ahead in line.

Sometimes I lead a life that is constantly on the move, and I forget to be present. After that day at Caritas, I keep coming back to the same questions: What did I see in that waiting room? What was happening in front of me that transformed these people?

I saw the breaking in of the Kingdom of God—a kingdom that lifestyles of “hustle and bustle” can dampen. I saw authentic community, not based on race or status, but on the commonality that recognizes we are truly in this together.

I saw the place Christ had envisioned of an upside-down transformation—the one that Mary holds in her song for the Lord.

It is the place where the powerful will be brought down from their thrones and the lowly lifted up—the place where the powerful will experience this community that the lowly already hold. The place that holds the truth of the incarnation. A place of perfect love revealed to humanity.

—Charles Conkin is minister to youth at Lake Shore Baptist Church in Waco, Texas. Since moving to Texas a few years ago to attend George W. Truett Theological Seminary in Waco, Charles has become deeply involved in ministries to people in need in his community.



art by Helen Siegl



art by Helen Siegl

# Love's Cradle

by Heather Herschap

As we approach the manger  
That holds what we wait for,  
The Christ child who humbles himself in humanity  
Who is strong enough to cradle creation  
But is meek enough to enter into the world's messiness,

We see  
The Alpha and Omega—Emmanuel—our Savior  
and Redeemer  
He who is salvation, is hope, is reconciliation, is life.  
He, this little infant will one day grow to reconcile us  
with the kingdom that is His.  
He is the incarnational God—incarnational love.  
He is love.

*—Heather Herschap is a writer and counselor living in Laredo, Texas. She hopes to return to a mission in India where she, as a person living with disabilities, has worked to encourage disabled and marginalized people.*



art by Helen Siegl

# Herod's Wait, Part 4

by Cameron Watts

## **Ten wives**

countless lovers  
adoration or  
at least respect  
Best to rule in power  
and know that love can be  
demanded  
from those who sit and caress  
and weep  
at my feet.  
All subjects are suspicious  
just as I  
Suspicious of every  
motive  
and they suspicious of mine  
There is equality  
and equals may  
love and be  
loved and  
I love the sound of an infant's  
Cry,  
another subject to love me.

—Cam Watts is the pastor of Aylmer Baptist Church, Aylmer Ontario. His award-winning poems have appeared in a number of Seeds publications. He wrote the four-stanza poem "Herod's Wait" especially for this issue of Sacred Seasons.

# *It Doesn't Matter*

**a nested meditation**

by Sharon R. Rollins



*art by Helen Siegl*

## ***It doesn't matter.***

It doesn't matter who you are.

It doesn't matter who you are;  
We all want.

It doesn't matter who you are...  
We all want to be loved.

It doesn't matter who you are.  
We all want.  
To be loved is to see that  
The Christ child comes for you.

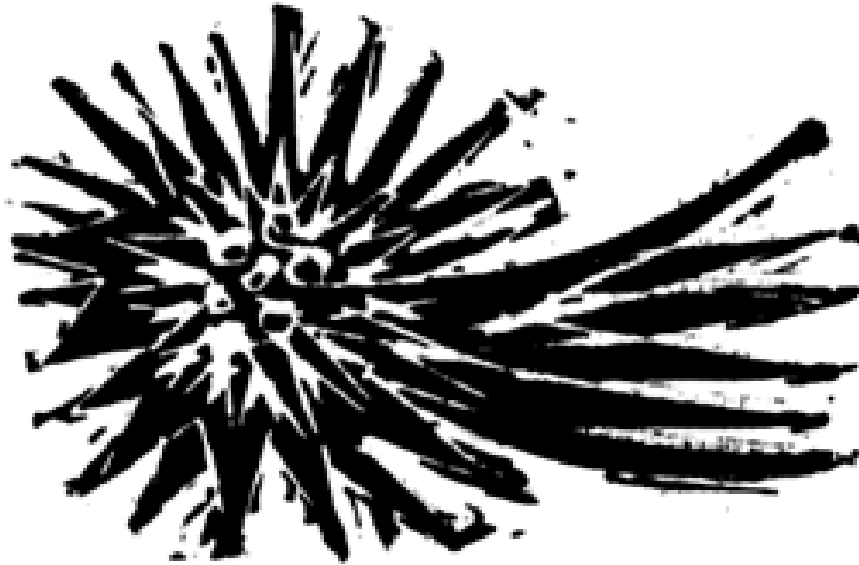
*Author's note: If you'd like, you can use the above meditation during Christmastide or Epiphany by changing the word comes, in the last line, to came.*

*—Sharon Rollins is a therapist and artist in Waco, Texas. She borrowed the style of "nested meditations" from Kevin Anderson's Divinity in Disguise.*



# Benediction

by John S. Ballenger



## **Go from here this night**

this night on which Christ was born,  
this night we await.

Go from here

to repeat the sounding joy  
of truth and grace at work together.

Go from here

to be a part of the thrill of hope—  
to work for the rejoicing of our weary world.

Go from here

with angel voices ringing in your ears  
to prepare your heart to make room.

Christ is born!

And your time on earth makes room for the  
divine.

You participate in the making fit of creation  
for heaven.

Go from here with the God with us,

Immanuel,

even Jesus Christ,

Amen.

*—From "Bring Your Hands Together: An Advent Meditation in Lessons and Carols for Nine Voices, Instrumentalists, Soloists and Choir in Three Acts for Christmas Eve" by John S. Ballenger, published in Sacred Seasons, Advent 1999, "Preparing the Way." Art on this page is by Helen Siegl.*