



*A Light
for
All Nations*

*Worship resources for the creative church
Advent & Christmastide 2012*

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



Worship Tools with an Attitude—Toward Justice, Peace & Food Security for All of God's People.

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

Staff and Volunteers

Editor: L. Katherine Cook
Business Manager: Kathy Gardner
Copy Editor: Deborah E. Harris
Editorial Assistant: Stormy Campbell
Library Assistant: Bill Hughes
ActLocallyWaco Editor: Ashley Thornton
Artists: Robert Askins, Sally Askins, Peter Yuichi Clark, Robert Darden, Van Darden, Erin Kennedy Mayer, Lenora Mathis, Kate Moore, Sharon Rollins, Susan Smith, Rebecca Ward

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Statement of Purpose

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

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art by Susan Daily

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: seededitor@clearwire.net. Web address: www.seedspublishers.org. Copyright © 2012.

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A Word about This Packet:

This worship packet comes to you with a great ideal of love and prayer, as do all of our packets.

The theme is about light, because it seems at this time that the world—all of the world, and not just our little corner of it—is clothed in darkness.

Most of the liturgy in the packet was written by our intern, Stormy Campbell, who is a professional writing student at Baylor University and plans to attend a seminary next fall. Her Lutheran background helped greatly to enhance the ecumenical spirit we strive to achieve.

The cover art was created especially for you by Sally Lynn Askins, the Vice-President of the Seeds Council of Stewards and one of our most dedicated artists. Sally's "day job" is as a professor of design at the Baylor University, but she tells us that one of her true joys is drawing angels for Seeds. (See below, right, for one of her 2010 Advent angels.) The angel on this cover is a depiction of one that Sally saw in a live nativity production as a child in southern Oklahoma. (See page 28 for her description of that experience). She also drew new angels, inspired by the Southern Oklahoma angel, for the four Sundays in Advent.

We have also selected some of our favorite Advent art by Sharon Rollins, who also supports Seeds in many other ways, and by Erin Kennedy Mayer, who has been creating art for Seeds since she was an art student at Baylor.

(If you are wondering why there are so many Baylor influences, the Seeds offices are housed by Seventh & James Baptist Church, which is literally across the street from the Baylor campus.)

We have sprinkled the pages, here and there with poetry by C. W. (Wally) Christian, a retired theological professor from Baylor, taken from a collection of his Christmas poems called *A Wreath of Songs for Advent and Christmastide*. You have seen others of his poems in Lent and Advent packets, and in the old Seeds Magazine and Sprouts, for the past 20 years. We also added a poem by Heather Herschap, a minister who lives in Laredo, TX, and frequently allows us to use her work.

We decided to go in a different (for us) direction for Epiphany, and explore the tradition among some Orthodox and Anglican churches that celebrates

Jesus' baptism at that time. The liturgy for that, written by Stormy Campbell, is based on those traditions, especially the blessing of water from the Anglican Church of Canada.

As always, we want you to feel free to play around with these liturgies and services, and adapt them to your congregation's needs and resources.

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 and ideas to this packet.

As always, the contents of this packet are your congregation's to use freely and share with others as the need arises. We really do pray that our materials, and this packet in particular, will help you and your congregation to observe a joyous and holy Advent, while remembering God's people who are in need.

—Gratefully,
The Seeds Staff and Council of Stewards



Art by Sally Lynn Askins

Theme Interpretation

by Deborah E. Harris



*“For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light.
Live as children of light—for the fruit of the light is found
in all that is good and right and true.”*
Ephesians 5:8-9

Waiting. I think it’s safe to say that most of us aren’t very good at it. We think of children as being impatient, joking about their “Are we there yet?” questions and “When can I, will I...?” queries. But we *all* ask those kinds of questions and countless more as we move through various stages and experiences of our lives.

Often the “waiting rooms” of life are places of uncertainty, anxiety and fear. Understandably so—it’s difficult to deal with the unknown and to live with the questions. But if we’re not careful, we can allow ourselves to withdraw into those waiting rooms, while life goes on without us.

God surely knows the dilemmas of our finite minds and existence, that if we are left to our own devices things can get complicated, and fear can become the catalyst of chaos and hatred and alienation. I believe God placed promptings within our deepest selves—a longing for clarity and purpose, a longing to know who we are and where we come from, a longing for love and light.

“Let there be light,” the very first declaration of the creation story, echoes as an expression from God’s heart—a desire to lift us from the formless void and covering of darkness into a relationship. The hope from the very beginning was to send a Redeemer to the waiting world, an incarnation bearing a “family resemblance” to draw us back to the One who made us!

*O Gracious God,
We journey through Advent,
and through each day of our lives,
waiting for the light.
We wait for the light of hope to keep us from sinking into despair,
when sorrow and suffering would overwhelm us.
We wait for the light of peace
to help us become children of reconciliation,
in the midst of unholy conflicts within our world
and within our hearts and minds.
We wait for the light of joy to teach us
to recognize and celebrate all that is good and right and true.
We wait for the light of love to fill us
with compassion for each other,
and for our neighbors—hungry, lonely, and in need of comfort.
We wait with faith in our Redeemer,
who is our Light and our Salvation.
Amen.*



*—Deborah Harris is a freelance writer and lyricist in Waco, TX. She is the secretary for the
Seeds Council of Stewards and is our most dedicated copy editor.*

Advent Confession

by William F. Cooper

Dear God,
We come to you grateful for life,
for the water we drink,
the food we eat,
for the air we breathe.
We come grateful for the family and community
that create the warmth
and sometimes the strife
in which we live.
We are grateful for our church,
for the comfort and guidance,
for the hope
found in its nurturing arms.

Dear God,
So often in the midst of your bounty,
—we think it is our bounty—
we see more clearly our need
for a clean heart,
wondering at times whether such
can ever be a dimension of human experience.
We see more clearly how we, unwittingly,
turn our backs
to issues that need to be addressed
with energy, commitment,
planning and years of work.
But we never get to them, because
we are so busy, busy, oh, so busy.

At those times, we see more clearly
how we come here,
to this place of worship
loaded down with baggage
that creates all sorts of
blindness
and barriers
that we have
convinced ourselves
are normal,
even Christian.

And we despair.

Yet, you come to us in the midst of our despair,
and you say

“Yes, things are in a mess.
Sit down a while.
Let’s see what we can do.”

Then we realize we are not alone,
that your presence is not some
warm, cozy feeling that comes and goes;
but the undergirding reality
of this disturbingly wonderful creation.
And we know how precious is the
strength of your steadfast love.

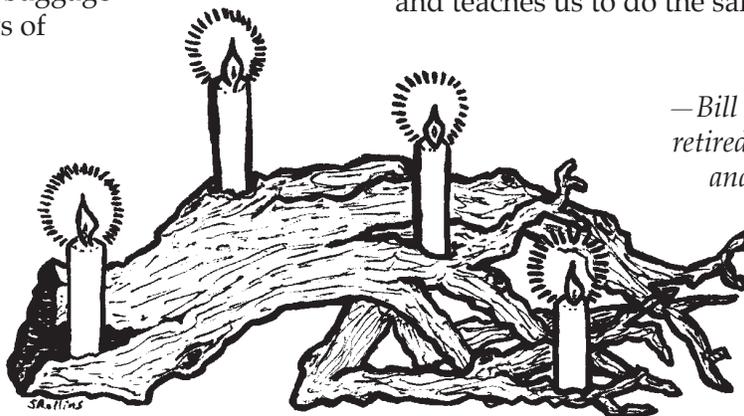
As we sit here with you,
we know the fountain of life is with you.
We know we see light in your light.
And with that light we can begin to work our way
Through the morass we have created
that leaves so many destitute,
despairing,
forgotten.

And so, as we sit here together, dear God,
you invite us to share bread
and the fruit of the vine,
as a reminder
that you are with us in this mess.

And you have shown us the pathway,
the pathway we can walk
in a disciplined, daily way,
as followers of yours.

And we know this is Truth, because
your Sent One came and walked it
and teaches us to do the same. Amen.

—Bill Cooper is a somewhat
retired professor of philosophy
and former Dean of Arts
and Sciences at Baylor
University in Waco,
TX.



art by Sharon R. Rollins

Week 1: The Light of Hope

*We wait for the light of hope to keep
us from sinking into despair,
when sorrow and suffering would
overwhelm us.
—Deborah E. Harris*



art by Sallylynn Askins

The Light of Hope:

Hymns & Lessons for the First Sunday of Advent

by Stormy Campbell

Opening Hymn

"When God Is a Child"

Music: Joan Collier Fogg, 1987

Words: Brian Wren, 1985

Tune: MOON BEAMS

Chalice Hymnal #132

Lighting of the Hope Candle

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Jeremiah 33:14-16

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."

Meditation

The implications of the name *Immanuel* are both comforting and unsettling. Comforting, because He has come to share the danger as well as the drudgery of our everyday lives. He desires to weep with us and to wipe away our tears. And what seems most bizarre, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, longs to share in and to be the source of the laughter and the joy we all too rarely know.

—Michael Card

Litany of Hope:

The God of Our Salvation

(From Psalm 25)

ONE: O God, in you we place our trust;

MANY: Lead us in your truth.

ONE: Make known to us your ways, O Lord,

MANY: Teach us your paths.

ONE: All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness;

MANY: You are the God of our salvation.

Meditation

A prison cell, in which one waits, hopes...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

Hymn

"O Promised One of Israel"

Words: Jane Parker Huber

Music: Traditional English melody

Coll. and arr. by Ralph Vaughan Williams

Tune: FOREST GREEN

A Singing Faith # 18

Epistle Reading

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith. Now may our God and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may God so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God, our Father and Mother, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Prayer

God of justice and peace, from the heavens you rain down mercy and kindness, that all on earth may stand in awe and wonder before your marvelous deeds.

Raise our heads in expectation, that we may yearn for the coming day of the Lord and stand without blame before your Son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.

Benediction

May you leave this place filled with hope as we begin our waiting for the coming of the Christ Child.

Gospel Reading

Luke 21:25-36

“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Hymn

“People, Look East”

Music: Traditional French carol

Harm Martin Shaw, 1928

Words: Eleanor Farjeon

Tune: BESANCON

Chalice Hymnal #142

To the deafening and perilous city streets,
To the scorched and parched fields of famine,
Come, Emmanuel,
and bring us the hope of abundance.

Where the valleys are so low
and the mountains so high,
Where oppressor and oppressed
writhe in brokenness,
Come, Prince of Peace,
bring healing in your wings.

Among the destitute,
among the privileged,
among the old and the young,
Among the male and the female,
among people of all nations,
Come, Everlasting One,
and bring us joy.

Among those who mistrust each other,
those who hate each other,
Among those who do not know the way
out of the chaos of our own making,
Come, Lord Jesus,
and teach us how to love.

To our world of shattered
dreams and constant sorrow,
Come, Holy One,
and dwell among us.
Bring your dream of peace
and plant it in our hearts.

—Katie Cook



Luke 1 Rewritten: A Reading for Early Advent

by Erin Conaway

Editor's note: This reading was written to precede a choral presentation of Magnificat by Mark Hayes on the first Sunday in Advent. A number of different things can be done with this, including a choral presentation of Magnificat by Johann Sebastian Bach, John Rutter or Sergei Rachmaninoff, a version from the Anglican Evensong or a reading of the passage from Luke or any one of a dozen liturgical settings. We have also reprinted a paraphrase from the very first Sacred Seasons Advent packet, in case that works for your congregation and situation. (See page 12.)

FIRST READER: Many have tried to tell an orderly tale about the various events that have been happening around here, but they are so numerous it can be hard to get a good handle on them. I've done my homework, and have talked to lots of different people who have different backgrounds and experiences, and have interviewed many of the disciples and members of the holy family. After my rigorous investigation, I've come up with the following account of what happened and hope you will find what you've been looking for in this amazing story.

SECOND READER: In the days of King Herod of Judea—I know that was a long time ago, but I think you'll find that people were still people then, just like they are now: hard to please, desperate to believe and in some ways just trying to survive. Among the ordinary folks lived a priest named Zechariah, who was a part of the priestly order of Abijah. (That's only going to matter to a few of you. The rest of you can just forget I said that.)

FIRST READER: Zechariah's wife, a salty woman of strong faith, was a descendant of Aaron, Moses' brother. She was almost genetically wired to have strong faith, but then again, aren't we all? Anyway, her name was Elizabeth. She and Zachariah

were a wonderful couple and had the kind of togetherness that was infectious to the people around them—you would leave them and think, "I want to be a better spouse and friend."

SECOND READER: They were righteous—not just like in the 1960s vernacular, but I mean they were really good people, pure and full of integrity. He was the kind of priest you'd be happy to just hang out with, and she was the kind of woman you wanted to be around in all kinds of different situations. They were both model citizens and synagogue members and their life together just seemed idyllic—except for one thing: they didn't have children.

FIRST READER: Now, there's nothing wrong with not having children, but in those days it was a big stigma. It made everyone wonder in the back of their minds why in the world God wouldn't give children to a couple like this—these were the



kind of people we would all want to reproduce. You could tell it gave them both a lot of pain, the way Elizabeth would tear up every time she held a new baby—but she did it anyway. Zechariah would always touch the kids' heads as he walked around town and through the Temple courtyard. He didn't have to say anything, he just had a way of rustling their hair and you could tell the kids felt his blessing, but you could also sense a longing in his eyes as he watched them run around and laugh like children do.

SECOND READER: Well, one day, when Zechariah was fulfilling his priestly duties before God, and all of the Temple priests were on duty, they cast lots to decide who would go into the sanctuary—the Holy of Holies, they called it—to burn the incense, and it fell to Zechariah. He'd been waiting for this day all of his life. He had dreamed about it, and now here he was. His skin was covered with goosebumps. He went through all of the ritual cleansings, and he felt a sense of calm wash over him as he completed the steps and was ready to go. Everyone was gathered and praying, and watching him as if their hopes and dreams and fears were all pinned to his robe.

FIRST READER: The robe grew heavy with the weight of expectation. He entered into that most holy space and began burning the incense, blinking from the smoke, breathing the pungent fragrance—and, suddenly, he felt dizzy. The room started spinning. He thought he was going to pass out. Then the angel of the Lord appeared before him to the right of the altar. He gasped in fear. He wanted to turn and run because he was so afraid, but he couldn't move, he couldn't breathe, he couldn't even blink.

SECOND READER: The angel seemed to sing to him in a way he could understand...it seemed deeper than words, but he somehow knew the meaning of it. He heard, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink. Even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go

before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

FIRST READER: A million thoughts went through his mind as the angel was singing to him. First, he worried that his prayer was supposed to be for all the people, but somehow the angel knew what was deep in his heart, and he worried that he'd been so selfish that he hadn't fulfilled his obligation as a priest. Then his heart leaped with joy at the thought of having a son...not just a son, but a son who would be a prophet, filled with the Holy Spirit, one who would turn the hearts of parents back to their children. This was what he had always wanted in his own life, and it was hard for him to see parents take their children for granted and to mistreat them, when he and Elizabeth would have taken their place in an instant.

SECOND READER: He remembered all of those months and years of waiting and hoping.... It was from that place of pain, ground deeply into his very being, that Zechariah spoke to the angel, saying, "How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is also getting on in years."

FIRST READER: He couldn't help himself—it just blurted out, and as soon as it did, he wished he'd never said it. The fear came back as the angel replied in a louder song, "I am Gabriel! I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur."

SECOND READER: And just like that, the angel was gone. Zechariah stood there with his mouth open, and then he realized he wasn't breathing anymore. He gasped again and remembered where he was...the incense was burned out, and his eyes were watering from the smoke and the smell. He finally came out, as if awakening from a coma or crawling from a cave. He wondered if what he had seen was real. Then he tried to answer his fellow priests, who were staring at him, asking what took so long.

FIRST READER: But no sound would come from his mouth. He wanted to tell them, but he couldn't even muster a squeak.

SECOND READER: In no time at all, Elizabeth came to Zechariah one morning and put his hand on her stomach and said, "We're going to have a son! This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people." And they held one another in their arms, and they marveled at this miracle.

FIRST READER: In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a teenaged girl engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The girl's name was Mary. And the angel of the Lord came to Mary and said, "Greetings, beloved one! The Lord is with you!"

SECOND READER: Mary was startled—by the appearance of a heavenly messenger in her house, and by the message he brought to her. She sat stunned, trying to decide if she should stand up or be still, if this was going to be a blessing for her, or if she was perhaps about to die. As the thoughts bounced back and forth in her head, the angel sang again in a voice that was impossible to describe. "Do not be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God. You will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

FIRST READER: Mary's mind was racing. She was excited to hear that she would be a mother and that her son would be...wait, did he say the Son of the Most High? It sounded like that. And he would be a king? This was too much to take in. She wondered what Joseph would say.

SECOND READER: As she tried to sort out all of this, the words in her head spilled out of her mouth as she said, mostly to herself, but out loud too: "How can this be, since I have not been with a man?"

FIRST READER: The angel almost seemed to smile at her, as if he had followed her stream of consciousness all the way through. He explained, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called the Son of God. And now, your cousin Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing is impossible with God."

SECOND READER: Mary was shivering all over, and she found herself saying, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." When she blinked the angel was gone. She put her hand on her stomach and felt the warmth wash over her body.

FIRST READER: Not long after her encounter with the angel, Mary went to visit Elizabeth and Zechariah. She didn't tell them she was coming. She had been lurking in the shadows, trying not to draw attention to her changing shape and the difficult questions it brought. When she moved aside the curtain in the door of Zechariah's house and said Elizabeth's name, Elizabeth's hand shot out and she grabbed a chair to steady herself.

SECOND READER: When Elizabeth turned around, Mary could see, to her astonishment, that she was also pregnant, and as the two awkwardly embraced around their growing good news, Elizabeth said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? As soon as I heard the sound of your voice, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

FIRST READER: The two just looked at one another, beaming with joy and new life. Mary's heart overflowed with wonder. She said...

(Here began the choral presentation.)

—Erin Conaway, a native of Midland, TX, is the pastor of Seventh & James Baptist Church in Waco, where the Seeds of Hope offices are housed. He is already a frequent contributor to Sacred Seasons.

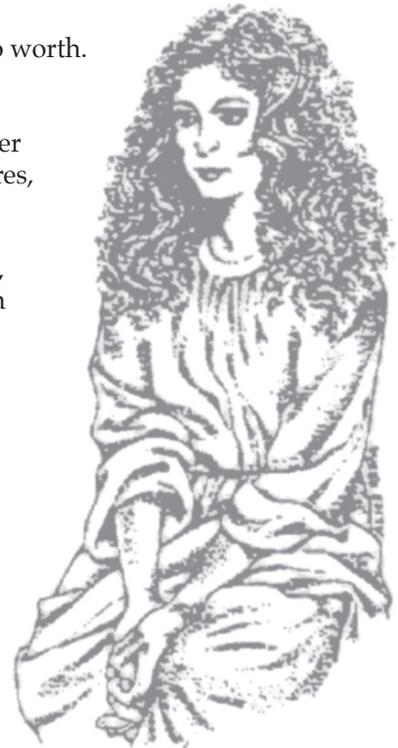
Magnificat

An Interpretation of Luke 1:46-55
by Katie Cook

My soul overflows with songs
of the enormity
and power
and mystery of God;
My spirit is full of joy
because God will be my redemption;
God has looked around the world of assorted humans
and found a poor woman,
a peasant,
a serf;
God has given that woman a noble, majestic quest—
to participate in the act of creation;
to bring a new life to humanity;
throughout history people will speak of this quest and say,
What joy she must have felt!
God is holy and filled with power;
God has done wonderful things just for me;
I am overflowing with joyful words.

God does take care of those
who remember the original instructions;
God is sometimes overpowering
to confuse those
who think power is theirs,
who think they know what power is,
who think that people can be ranked according to worth.
Their own arrogance will cause them
to be scattered upon the earth.
God takes those in positions of earthly power
and watches them destroy their own structures,
their thrones,
and those things that they hoard;
they will be stripped of this earthly power,
and their toys of destruction and exclusion
will be useless.
Those who are now thought
to be of little worth
will be in power.

Thus the hungry will be fed at last,
and those who had been greedy
are sent away
without their material securities.
God never forgot the promises
made to Abraham and Sarah;
They have been kept,
and will be kept forever.



—Katie Cook is the *Seeds of Hope* editor. The above was first printed in
"The People Who Walked in Darkness Have Seen a Great Light," Advent 1998, Sacred Seasons.

Week 2: The Light of Peace

*We wait for the light of peace
to help us become children of reconciliation,
in the midst of unholy conflicts within our world
and within our hearts and minds.*

—Deborah E. Harris



art by Sallylynn Askins

The Light of Peace:

Hymns & Lessons for the Second Sunday of Advent

by Stormy Campbell

Opening Hymn

"All Earth is Waiting"

Words: Alberto Taule, 1972,
Gertrude C. Suppe, 1987, alt.

Music: Alberto taule, 1972;

Harmony by Skinner Chavez-Melo, 1988

Tune: TAULE

Chalice Hymnal #139

Lighting of the Hope and Peace Candles

Reading from the Hebrew Scripture

Baruch 5:1-9

Take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction, O Jerusalem, and put on forever the beauty of the glory from God. Put on the robe of the righteousness that comes from God; put on your head the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting; for God will show your splendor everywhere under heaven. For God will give you evermore the name, "Righteous Peace, Godly Glory."

Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height; look toward the east, and see your children gathered from west and east at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that God has remembered them. For they went out from you on foot, led away by their enemies; but God will bring them back to you, carried in glory, as on a royal throne. For God has ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low and the valleys filled up, to make level ground, so that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God. The woods and every fragrant tree have shaded Israel at God's command. For God will lead Israel with joy, in the light of God's glory, with the mercy and righteousness that come from him.

Meditation

A noted poet was once asked in an interview if he could explain one of his poems "in ordinary

terms." He replied with some feeling, "If I could say what I meant in ordinary terms I would not have had to write the poem."

From the time of Christ's birth the people of God have "had to write a poem" to Christmas, composing a single multi-stranded paean of praise spanning the centuries, because ultimately the meaning of Christmas resists being fully spelled out "in ordinary terms."

—Brian Linard, *A Way to the Heart of Christmas*

Litany of Peace:

The Song of Zechariah

(based on Luke 1:68-79)

ONE: Blessed be the LORD God of Israel,

MANY: For God has looked favorably on her people and redeemed them.

ONE: God has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of her servant David.

MANY: God has spoken through the mouths of the holy prophets from old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.

ONE: Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered the holy covenant, the oath that God swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve God without fear,

MANY: In holiness and righteousness before the Lord all our days.

ONE: And you, my son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.

MANY: By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us

ONE: To give light to those who sit in darkness

and in the shadow of death,
MANY: To guide our feet into the way of peace.

Meditation

I cannot cause light; the most I can do is try to put myself in the path of its beam. It is possible, in deep space, to sail on solar wind. Light, be it particle or wave, has force: you rig a giant sail and go. The secret of seeing is to sail on solar wind. Hone and spread your spirit till you yourself are a sail, whetted, translucent, broadside to the merest puff.

—Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

Hymn

“Savior of the Nations, Come”

Words: Ambrose of Milan, 397

(Stanzas 1 & 2 by Martin Luther, 1524)

Music: *Enchiridion Oder Handbüchlein*

Harmony by Johann Sebastian Bach

Tune: NUN KOMM, Der Heiden Heiland

Epistle Reading

Philippians 1:3-11

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God’s grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight, to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Prayer

Out of the embrace of mercy and righteousness, you have brought forth joy and dignity for your people, O Holy One of Israel.

Remember now your ancient promise:
make straight the paths that lead to you,

and smooth the rough ways,
that in our day
we might bring forth your compassion
for all humanity. Amen.

Gospel Reading

Luke 3:1-6

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

Hymn

“O Come, O Come Emmanuel”

Words: 12th century Latin hymn

Stanzas 1-2 translated by John Mason Neale, 1851

Stanzas 3-4 translated by Henry Sloan Coffin, 1916

Music: 15th century French melody

Arranged & harmonized

by Thomas Helmore, 1854

Tune: VENI EMMANUEL

Chalice Hymnal #119

Benediction

May you go forth from this place with continued hope, and may the light of God’s peace illumine your path.



art by Gertrud Mueller Nelson

Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings

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

What do I want for Christmas?
I want to kneel in Bethlehem,
The air thick with alleluias,
The angels singing
That God is born among us.
In the light of the Star,
I want to see them come,
The wise ones and the humble.
I want to see them come
Bearing whatever they treasure
To lay at the feet
Of him who gives his life.
—Ann Weems

Sacred time happens whether or not we feel it. As we bustle through our Christmas activities right up to and sometimes beyond midnight on Christmas Eve, above us, under us, inside us the moment of Christmas is happening. All we can do is observe the moment.

Build a ring of quiet around Christmas Eve. Tread softly, give it space. Listen, watch, observe. Christmas is living and many layered. It is peace; yet it is extreme crisis as reflected in the gospel stories of King Herod's massacre of the children of Bethlehem.

Christmas is crisis, but in the darkest hour of the darkest night, the tide begins to turn. Christmas Eve is suspense: "the hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight." A miracle is happening and it includes us. It is just downstairs, by the tree, by the fire, outside your door, in the holy darkness.
—Nikki Simpson

It might be easy to run away to a monastery, away from the commercialization, the hectic hustle, the demanding family responsibilities of Christmas-time. Then we would have a holy Christmas. But

we would forget the lesson of the Incarnation, of the enfleshing of God—the lesson that we who are followers of Jesus do not run from the secular; rather we try to transform it. It is our mission to make holy the secular aspects of Christmas just as the early Christians baptized the Christmas tree. And we do this by being holy people—kind, patient, generous, loving, laughing people—no matter how maddening is the Christmas rush.

—Fr. Andrew Greeley

All the broken hearts shall rejoice;
all those who are heavy laden,
whose eyes are tired and do not see,
shall be lifted up
to meet with the motherly healer.
The battered souls and bodies shall be healed;
the hungry shall be fed;
the imprisoned shall be free;
all her earthly children shall regain joy
in the reign of the just and loving one
coming for you
coming for me
in this time
in this world.

—Sun Ai Park, Korea

art by Erin Kennedy Mayer



Week 3: The Light of Joy

*We wait for the light of joy
to teach us to recognize and
celebrate all that is good and
right and true.*

—Deborah E. Harris



art by Sallylynn Askins

The Light of Joy:

Hymns & Lessons for the Third Sunday of Advent

by Stormy Campbell

Opening Hymn

“When Christ Is Born the Cosmos Sings”

Words: Jane Parker Huber

Music: Pensum Sacru, 1648

Harmony from Cantonale Sacrum, 1651

Tune: HERR JESU CHRIST

A Singing Faith #23

Lighting of the Hope, Peace & Joy Candles

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away the judgments against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst, you shall fear disaster no more. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory, he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love, he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival. I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it.

I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the LORD.

Meditation

Advent is the perfect time to clear and prepare the Way. Advent is a winter training camp for those who desire peace. By reflection and prayer, by reading and meditation, we can make our hearts a place where a blessing of peace would desire to abide and where the birth of the Prince of Peace might take place.

Daily we can make an Advent examination. Are there any feelings of discrimination toward race, sex, or religion? Is there a lingering resentment, an unforgiven injury living in our hearts? Do we look down upon others of lesser social standing or educational achievement? Are we generous with the gifts that have been given to us, seeing ourselves as their stewards and not their owners? Are we reverent of others, their ideas and needs, and of creation? These and other questions become Advent lights by which we may search the deep, dark corners of our hearts.

Edward Hays, *A Pilgrim's Almanac*

Litany of Joy:

Give Thanks to the Lord

(from Isaiah 12:2-6)

ONE: Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid,

MANY: For the LORD GOD is my strength and my might; God has become my salvation.

ONE: With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day:

MANY: Give thanks to the LORD, call on God's name; make known God's deeds among the nations; proclaim that God's name is exalted.

ONE: Sing praises to the LORD, for God has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth.

MANY: Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

Meditation

When we think of that choir of angels, that multitude of heavenly hosts, blazing forth in light and sound, God's: "I bring you good tidings of great joy," it would seem to necessarily entail somewhat more than feeling good and being glad. Especially when we know more of the story, when we know more of the details through which the joy is delivered—through which the joy is made flesh, when we have a little more of the perspective God presumably had when the angels were sent to

proclaim the advent of joy, when we have a clear perspective into the details of misunderstanding and rejection, the deep pain of betrayal, physical torture and death. Good tidings of great joy. Alleluia.

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

Hymn

“O Thou Joyful (Oh Santissimo!)”

Words: Johannes D. Falk

Translated by Henry Katerjohn, 1919

Spanish Translation by Frederico Fliedner

Music: Tattersall’s *Psalmody*, 1794

Tune: O SANCTISSIMA

Chalice Hymal #169

Epistle Reading

Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in the LORD always, again I will say, rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Responsive Prayer

ONE: God of timeless grace,

MANY: You fill us with joyful expectation.

ONE: Make us ready for the message that prepares the way

MANY: That with uprightness of heart and holy joy we may eagerly await the kingdom of your Son, Jesus Christ,

ONE: Who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit

MANY: now and forever. Amen.

Gospel Reading

Luke 3:7-18

John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you,

God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

And the crowds asked him, “What then should we do?”

In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.”

Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?”

He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.”

Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.”

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

Hymn

“Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee”

Words: Henry van Dyke, 1907

Music: Ludwig van Beethoven, 1824

Arranged by Edward Hodges, 1864

Descant by Susan Adams, 1995

Tune: HYMN TO JOY

Chalice Hymnal #2

Benediction

May you go from this place in the light of God’s hope and peace, and may your joy be unbounded.



Christmas Treasures

An Activity for Children, Youth & Others

by Katie Cook

My friend Bill Salyers recently reminded me of a wonderful gift idea that could be adapted to use with children. It would also be ideal for young people, as well as adults. Bill's family had succeeded, he wrote, after five years of discussion, in limiting their gifts for each other to stocking stuffers. The expense of getting to each other from across the country, he added, constituted a large part of their gift to each other.

Bill wrote the following about the first Christmas after his family adopted this practice:

We have a tradition of Christmas morning crepes, creamed chipped beef, and strawberries. Our oldest daughter found some small cheap boxes that look like miniature sea chests. Then at breakfast she gave each of us one of those 29-cent boxes, 1x2x1.5 inches, with a paper folded inside. The paper was personalized with her favorite/strongest/deepest memories of that person. Her husband could not read his aloud for the tears and sobbing. Neither could I. Then she read aloud to all of us a longer paper that recalled her fondest memories of past Christmas experiences. My wife and I were caregivers for my ailing mother, who has since died. It was wonderful to see the joy and pride in her face as our family found ways to share our deepest feelings. It was the kind of family that she had always intended.

We are always complaining about the commercialism of Christmas, particularly in the US. Many of us have subscribed to "Whose Birthday Is It, Anyway?" and have read *Unplug the Christmas Machine*—both wonderful resources from Alternatives for Simple Living. Most of us have heard of this kind of gift-giving before.

My family, which at one time drew names for gift-giving (divided by generation), made a pact one year to give only a handmade gift to the person whose name we drew. It is one of my favorite Christmas memories. We discovered many hidden

talents among us, and most of us still appreciate those gifts. I haven't been able to get them to do it again. (They said it caused too much stress!)

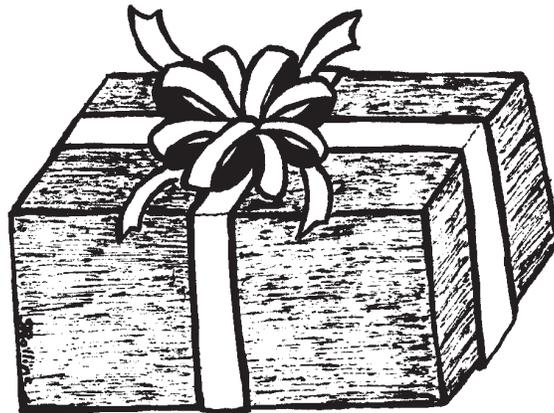
I have, however, managed to put together a few "treasure boxes" like Bill described, and the recipients say they were more meaningful than anything else I've ever given them. I scouted out attractive boxes and receptacles from thrift stores and filled them with notes on small pieces of paper.

Some of the notes recounted my favorite memories of that person, or why I am grateful for that person. Some of them have related encouraging Bible verses or inspiring quotes. Sometimes I color-code them. (For example, the blue ones might be scripture verses, the green ones might be quotes, and the yellow ones might be favorite memories. If I do this, I put in a card with the color code on it.) Once my goddaughter helped me tie about fifty tiny scrolls with ribbon to go into a miniature trunk.

It seems that this would be a good activity for a youth or children's group—or even for a whole congregation. I would imagine that the parents of teenagers would treasure a few notes saying they are appreciated, in spite of evidence to the contrary. Homebound folks from your church, or even folks from the older Sunday school classes, would cherish a gift of this type from the youth or children (with perhaps drawings included.)

Perhaps each child or young person could write or draw a small note to each person in your chosen group. Then the collections could go into whatever boxes you have chosen (they could even decorate the boxes), and the young people could present them to the recipients one Sunday afternoon, during Sunday school, or during a caroling excursion. Your imagination is the limit.

—Katie Cook is the Seeds of Hope editor. This piece is reprinted from "Dreaming God's Dream," Sacred Seasons, Advent/Christmastide 2006.



art by Sharon R. Rollins

Week 4: The Light of Love



*We wait for the light of love to fill us
with compassion for each other, and for
our neighbors—hungry, lonely and in
need of comfort.
—Deborah E. Harris*

art by Sallylynn Askins

The Light of Love:

Hymns & Lessons for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

by Stormy Campbell

Opening Hymn

"When Love Is Found"

Words: Brian Wren

Music: Traditional English melody

Harmony by Martin West

Tune: O WALY WALY

Chalice Hymnal #499

Advent Reading

See "Advent Longings" on page 24

Reading from the Hebrew Scripture

Micah 5:2-5a

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace.

Meditation

The house lights go off and the footlights come on. Even the chattiest stop chattering as they wait in darkness for the curtain to rise. In the orchestra pit, the violin bows are poised. The conductor has raised his baton. In the silence of a midwinter dusk, there is far off in the deeps of it somewhere a sound so faint that for all you can tell it may be only the sound of the silence itself. You hold your breath to listen. You walk up the steps to the front door. The empty windows at either side of it tell you nothing, or almost nothing. For a second you catch a whiff of some fragrance that reminds you of a place you've never been and a time you have no words for. You are aware of the beating of your heart... The extraordinary thing that is about to happen is matched only by the extraordinary moment just before it happens. Advent is the name of that moment.

— Frederick Buechner, *Whistling in the Dark*

Meditation

When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with the flocks,
then the work of Christmas begins:

to find the lost,

to heal those broken in spirit,

to feed the hungry,

to release the oppressed,

to rebuild the nations,

to bring peace among all peoples,

to make a little music with the heart...

And to radiate the Light of Christ,
every day, in every way, in all that we do and in all that we say.

Then the work of Christmas begins.

—Howard Thurman

Hymn

"More Love to Thee, O Christ"

Words: Elizabeth P. Prentiss, 1869

Music: William H. Doane, 1870

Tune: MORE LOVE TO THEE

Chalice Hymnal #527

or

"Be Thou My Vision"

Words: 8th-century Irish song

Translated by Mary E. Byrne, 1905

Versed by Eleanor H. Hull, 1912

Music: Traditional Irish melody

Harmony by Carlton R. Young, 1963

Tune: SLANE

Chalice Hymnal #595

Epistle Reading

Hebrews 10:5-10

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me, in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, 'See, God, I have come to do your will, O God' (in the scroll of the book it is written of me.)"

When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasures in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings" (these are offered according to the law), then he added, "See, I have come to do your will." He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all.

Prayer

Shepherd of Israel, you gently support the one who is with child and call forth the Lamb who dances in the womb. Stir our hearts to recognize Christ's coming, as Elizabeth recognized his presence in Mary's radiant obedience to your desire, and open our souls to receive the One who came to love your flock. Amen.

Gospel Reading

Luke 1:39-45, (46-55)

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

And Mary said, "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. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from

their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He 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."

Hymn

"Come, O Long Expected Jesus"

Music: Rowland H. Prichard, 1830;

Harmony by *The English Hymnal*, 1906

Words: Charles Wesley, 1744

Tune: HYFRYDOL

Chalice Hymnal #125

Benediction

As you leave this place, may the God of all infuse you with hope and peace, and breathe into your hearts a spirit of joy and love.

O Magnum Mysterium

O

Great

Mystery!

That in the

lowliness of flesh

there came forth

God most high.

O Great mystery!

That in the travail of birth

was born in the death of death,

that the sweet fragrance of holiness

was mingled with the earthiness of a stable

and that there knelt together peasants

in homespun and kings in purple and gold.

O be still! Be still in breathless adoration.

Gaze

now

in

wonder

at Grace and Mercy born.

—C. W. Christian

Advent Longings

A Reading for Youth, Children & Others

by Jackie Saxon and Katie Cook

Authors' note: This reading (taken from Job 23, Psalm 139 and Isaiah 7) calls for a small vocal ensemble of about four people, a vocal soloist (a child or young person, if possible), and two readers. The readers are standing (possibly at lecterns) on either side of the platform area. The vocal ensemble is behind the congregation, if possible. The child is sitting (very still) on the floor in the middle of the platform, with arms around his or her knees. The lighting should be muted; if you can, cast a light so that the congregation can see the child's silhouette.

As always, please adapt these readings and settings and incorporate your own ideas until it fits your congregation's needs.

Before the reading begins, the ensemble begins to sing slowly, a cappella, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel:" (see the bottom of the page for details about the hymn)

O come, O come Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the son of God appear.

After the ensemble completes the first verse (not the chorus), the readers begin. The ensemble continues humming quietly through the chorus and into the next verses.

FIRST READER: Today I will
bitterly complain because I
cannot find God. God, your
hand is heavy in spite of my
groaning.

SECOND READER: O God,
where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your
presence?

FIRST READER: Oh, that I knew
where I might find God, that
I might come even to the holy
dwelling.

SECOND READER: If I ascend
to heaven, you are there; if I

make my bed in the realm of the dead, you are there.

FIRST READER: If I go forward, you are not there;
or backward, I cannot find you.

SECOND READER: If I take the wings of the
morning, and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand will lead me and hold me fast.

FIRST READER: On the left you hide, and I cannot
behold your presence. I turn to the right, but I
cannot see you.

SECOND READER: Even the darkness is not dark to
you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is
as light to you.

FIRST READER: God spoke to me and said that I
should ask for sign, be it deep as Sheol or as high as
heaven. But I am afraid to ask for a sign.

SECOND READER: Hear then, O House of David,
God is giving you a sign anyway: Look, the young
woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall
name him Emmanuel, which is to say, "God is with
us."

*At this point, the child soloist
stands and sings the chorus slowly
into the quiet:*

Rejoice, rejoice; Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel!

*— Jackie Saxon is Vice President
for Student Affairs and Vocations
at Austin Presbyterian Theological
Seminary in Austin, TX. Katie
Cook is the Seeds of Hope editor.*

*"O Come, O Come Emmanuel;"
Words: 12th century Latin hymn;
Stanzas 1-2 translated by John
Mason Neale, 1851; Stanzas 3-4
translated by Henry Sloan Coffin,
1916; Music: 15th century French
melody; Arranged & harmonized by
Thomas Helmore, 1854; Tune: VENI
EMMANUEL; Chalice Hymnal #11*



Lessons, Carols & Candles: A Love Feast for Christmas Eve *(Featuring Elements of the Moravian Love Feast)* compiled by Stormy Campbell

Opening Hymn

"Love Came Down at Christmas"
Words: Christina Rossetti, 1885
Music: Traditional Irish melody
Harmony by David Evans, 1927
Celebrating Grace Hymnal #147

Reading from the Hebrew Scripture

Isaiah 9:2-7

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness, on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us, authority rests upon his shoulders, and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Lighting of the Hope, Peace, Joy, Love & Christ Candles

As the congregation sings each verse of "One Candle Is Lit," someone lights the corresponding candle. As the congregation sings "One candle is lit for the hope of the age," someone lights the Hope candle, when it sings "One candle is lit for the reign of God's peace," someone lights the Peace candle, and so on. It might be good to ask a different person (or group or family) to light each candle.

"One Candle Is Lit"

Words: Mary Anne Parrott, 1985
Music: William J. Kirkpatrick, 1895
Tune: CRADLE SONG
Chalice Hymnal #128

Gospel Reading

Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child.

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. In that region there were shepherds living in



the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger."

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.

But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Prayer

We bless you, our God,
for you are Mother and Father of us all,
and you have visited your people
in one like us;
in human fragility you have revealed
the face of divinity.
Gather into your arms
all the peoples of the world,
so that, in your embrace,
we may find blessing, peace
and the fullness of our inheritance
as your daughters and sons. Amen.

Moravian Love Feast

The Moravian Love Feast is a celebration of love in community. During the feast, participants share bread (usually sweet buns) and coffee (or tea). The congregants sing three hymns while the bread and drinks are distributed. Instruct the participants to pray in love for one another during this time, and to concentrate on those sitting besides them.

Invitation to the Feast

The following should be read aloud:

All of the followers of Christ were together in Jerusalem during the very earliest days of the church. They held all of their possessions in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts (Acts 2:44-47). Therefore, we, as a community of believers, will now share with each other in a Love Feast.

First Carol

"O Come, All Ye Faithful"

Words: John Francis Wade

Translated by Frederick Oakeley, 1841, et. al.

Music: John Francis Wade

Descant: David Willcocks, 1961

Tune: ADESTE FIDELES

Chalice Hymnal #148

Second Carol

"Angels, from the Realms of Glory"

Words: James Montgomery, 1816

Music: Henry T. Smart, 1867

Tune: REGENT SQUARE

Chalice Hymnal #149

Third Carol

"Joy to the World! The Lord Is Come"

Words: Isaac Watts, 1719

Music: Attributed to George Frederick Handel, 1741

Arranged by Lowell Mason, 1848

Tune: ANTIOCH

Chalice Hymnal #143

After all have participated in the feast, the entire congregation says together the Moravian table grace:

Come, Lord Jesus, Our guest to be,
And bless these gifts, bestowed by thee.
Bless our dear ones everywhere,
Keep them in thy loving care. Amen.

Closing Hymn

"Silent Night, Holy Night"

Words: Joseph Mohr, 1818

Translated by John F. Young, 1863

Music: France Gruber, 1818

Tune: STILLE NACHT

Chalice Hymnal #145

During the closing hymn, candles are passed out to each participant. The lights in the worship space should be lowered. The leaders light the first candle at each row, and then participants light each other's candles. Participants then greet each other by passing the peace of Christ and wishing each other a joyous Christmas.

Some Things about Moravian Love Feasts

by Crystal Carter Abad and Katie Cook

The Moravian Church was founded during the nearly Reformation, around 1457, in Bohemia and the area that is now the Czech Republic. Moravian Christians have a long history of celebrating Love Feasts. These celebrations are patterned after the Agape feasts of the early Church as described in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles (verses 43-47).

Over the centuries, Moravian churches have traditionally celebrated Love Feasts on Watch Night (New Year's Eve), Good Friday, Christmas Eve and on other occasions. The emphasis during these services is on harmony, goodwill and reconciliation among the fellowship.

Moravian Christians brought the practice of Love Feasts to the American colonies, particularly around Pennsylvania and the Carolinas. Some came to the Winston-Salem area of North Carolina in 1753 to escape religious persecution in Europe. The town of Old Salem, NC, proudly displays and celebrates the old Moravian traditions.

The Christmas Eve Love Feasts are musical services, in which the congregation partakes of simple food while the choir sings appropriate hymns and anthems, or while the organ plays quietly. The congregation is traditionally served plain sweet buns and hot drinks (coffee, tea or chocolate) in the time it takes to sing three hymns.

Beeswax candles are distributed just before the end of the service, and as the choir and/or congregation reaches the last phrase of the final hymn (one favorite is "Joy to the World! The Lord Is Come"), participants raise their lighted candles in praise and celebration of the birth of the Baby King. (Beeswax candles were preferred because, as late as the 15th century, devout people believed that bees came straight from Paradise.)

Moravians generally think of Love Feasts as separate from the Lord's Supper—saying that, while the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion, celebrates the relationship between God and each believer, Love Feasts celebrate the holy fellowship that believers enjoy with one another. Herbert Spaugh, a Moravian historian, wrote, "Since love is the greatest power in the world, and Christian love is the greatest of virtues, I have often wondered why more branches of the Church do not adopt the Lovefeast as one of their appointed services."

—Crystal Carter Abad, a former *Seeds* intern, lives in Los Angeles, CA. Katie Cook is the *Seeds of Hope* editor.

Moravian Love Feast Buns

1 cake yeast
1/4 cup tepid water
1 cup sugar
1 egg, beaten
1/4 cup soft butter
1 tsp. salt
1/4 cup warm mashed potatoes
2 cups or more lukewarm water
Melted butter or cream for glazing



Dissolve yeast in 1/4 cup warm water. Add sugar to beaten egg, then softened butter, salt, warm mashed potatoes, and yeast mixture. Add alternately flour and warm water to make soft but firm dough. Knead until smooth on lightly floured board or in hands.

Cover with clean, warm cloth and set in warm place to rise until double in bulk. When dough has risen, punch down and make into buns 3" to 4" in diameter. (If preferred, any other shape may be made with this dough.) Place so they do not touch on greased sheets. Cover with warm cloth and let rise again.

Place in 400 F. oven and bake until brown, about 20 minutes. Brush with cream or melted butter just before removing from stove. Makes 18 to 20 buns.

Source: "Moravian Treats from Old Salem," Visit North Carolina, www.visitnc.com

Angels in Oklahoma

by Sally Lynn Askins



art by Sally Lynn Askins

Editor's note: Sally Askins has created several dozen Angels for Sacred Seasons Advent packets over the past 10 years—including five new ones for this year's packet. She wrote the following story about her own special childhood angel for a church Advent booklet. In the narrative, we can find hints at the reasons for her deep connection with angels. The angel depicted above is the one she describes in this story.

It is 1957 in Southern Oklahoma. The night sky of my memory is a deep, crisp blackness that recedes into infinity. This sky is filled not only with the ever-present flame that is the burn-off at the oil refinery, but also with magical stars that are prisms reflecting light and mystery. (The stars in the Southern Oklahoma sky are bigger and brighter than any place I know.)

We pull up to the white frame house that my grandfather built some 30 years earlier. I pretend

to be asleep because I know, if I do so, that my Daddy will pick me up, and he will carry me in his strong arms into the warm comfort that is Mamaw and Papaw's house on Chestnut Street.

It is Christmas Eve, the house still smells a little of supper's chicken and fried okra. Mamaw is watching "The Lawrence Welk Christmas Show" with my cousins gathered in front of a rabbit-eared television.

They wait for the weatherman to break in over the air with the announcement that Santa had been spotted flying over Duncan. Because of Gene Autrey and a claymation-animated special, we know that Santa travels in a sleigh fronted by an awkward, youthful, red-nosed reindeer.

Sure enough, the soap bubbles of the Champagne Music Makers are interrupted by an announcement. Santa has appeared on the Norad radar. Such news triggers action, for Santa will be here soon. I have long since awakened from my pretend sleep, because cousins are around. My big brother and the

cousins his age all seem to have a secret, but for this night it doesn't matter. We are going to Bethlehem to see Jesus.

We pile back into the blue and white '56 Buick Special that is my father's pride and joy. We head out for the huge office building that is built on the edge of what was once the Chisholm Trail.

My grandfather, one of the original employees of that company, had been given a very special project by the president. He was in charge of orchestrating a life-size nativity that now sat at the edge of a highway where cattle had run not so long ago.

Because of Papaw, we grandchildren have a special privilege. In the dark night, in the shadow of a refinery flame, we get to play in a stable in the Holy Land.

In front of a company that specializes in drilling mud, a bible scene runs almost the full length of the corporate building. As we walk toward the nativity, I

now know the Sunday-school flannel-graph lessons are not just stories.

There is a baby doll that is Jesus, and costumed figures the size of grownups. We know they might just come to life when we aren't looking, especially since it is Christmas. There are camels and a donkey to ride, and sheep to pet. The sheep follow shepherds with staffs. The kings are glittery and majestic. Mary and Joseph quietly watch a baby lying in a manger.

And lo, soaring gracefully above all is a beautiful winged being playing a golden horn. She is an angel. She is beautiful. She is a messenger from God's world. She proclaims to one and all the importance of this moment.

I know instantly that she will be a perfect playmate to have as a friend. After all, this angel knows both God and the baby Jesus. In days to come, my mother will have to set an extra plate at the table for the angel. She will have to hold the doors of the Buick open a little longer because it takes extra time to get a set of wings in the back seat.

The angel will become my constant companion, even though there will be those who refer to her as an imaginary playmate. How silly grownups will be to think that she could be pretend. How were they to know that to have an angel as a lifelong companion is to always have with you the gentle memory of a most Sacred Nativity, a nativity that will become the foundation of your entire being?

But that is yet to come. Tonight is Christmas. The

grownups think maybe they saw a sleigh overhead. They think that while we were at the nativity Santa might have come. We scramble for the car. I look once more at my angel, and I reach up for my father. I know that, if I do so, my Daddy will pick me up, drive to his Dad's, and he will carry me in his strong arms into the warm comfort that is Mamaw and Papaw's house on Chestnut Street.

—Sally Lynn Askins is Vice President of the Seeds Council of Stewards and one of our premier artists. She is an internationally acclaimed costume designer and works currently as a professor of design in the Baylor University Department of Theatre Arts.

This season, this Christmas, this day
I need a savior of peace
To settle my unsettled soul

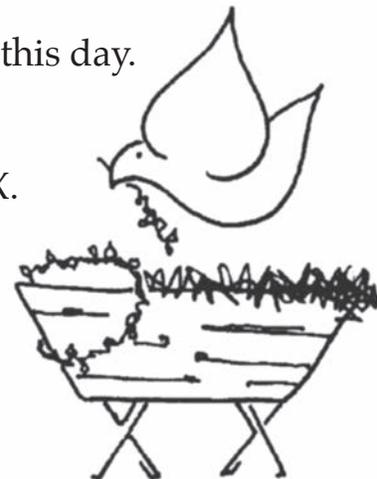
I need a savior of love
To love my broken heart

I need a savior of redeeming quality
To help remind me that I am forgiven
And free me from worry and guilt.

I need a savior full of grace and hope
Who meets with the past, present, and future me

And so I wait for the bundle of joy
That is my peace, my grace, my hope,
my redeemer and my love.
This season, this Christmas, this day.

—Heather Herschap is a
minister living in Laredo, TX.



art by Erin Kennedy Mayer

Hymns & Readings for Epiphany

compiled by Stormy Campbell

Opening Hymn

"When Jesus Came to Jordan"

Words: Fred Patt Green, 1973

Music: William Walker's *Southern Harmony*, 1835

Harmony by Thomas Leary, 2008

Tune: COMPLAINER

Celebrating Grace Hymnal #152

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Isaiah 60:1-6

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.

Responsive Reading from the Psalms

Psalms 72:1-7, 10-14

ONE: Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness. May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy and crush the oppressor. MANY: May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations. May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth. In his days, may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more.

ONE: May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute, may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts. For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence he redeems their life, and precious is their blood in his sight.

Reading from the Epistles

Ephesians 3:1-12

This is the reason that I, Paul, am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power.

Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

Reading from the Gospels

Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to

Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.

They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage."

When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Prayer

God of revelation, as we gather in praise for the gracious mystery of your Son, we remember the many needs of your church and your world.

Prayers of the People, concluding with:

Guide us on the path of salvation, O God, that the radiance and power of your Holy Spirit working in the world will gather together all peoples and nations in one community to offer you worship and proclaim your splendor. Amen

Hymn

"Brightest and Best"

Words: Reginald Heber, 1811

Music: *Southern Harmony*, 1835

Harmony by Marty Haugen, 1987

Tune: STAR IN THE EAST

Chalice Hymnal #174

Prelude to Blessing of the Water

FIRST READER: The voice of the Lord upon the

waters cries out, saying, "Come, all of you, receive the Spirit of wisdom, the Spirit of understanding, the Spirit of the fear of God, of Christ who has appeared."

SECOND READER: Today the nature of the waters is made holy, and Jordan is parted and holds back the flow of its waters as it sees the Master washing himself.

FIRST READER: As man, Christ King, you came to the river, and in your goodness you hastened to accept the baptism of a servant at the hands of the Forerunner, on account of our sins, O Lover of all people.

SECOND READER: At the voice of the one crying in the desert, "Prepare the way of the Lord," you came, Lord, having taken the form of a servant, asking for baptism, though you did not know sin.

FIRST READER: The waters saw you and were afraid. The Forerunner trembled and cried out, saying, "How will the lamp enlighten the Light?"

SECOND READER: The servant placed his hand on the Master and said, "Savior, who takes away the sin of the world, make me and the waters holy."

MANY: Glory to the Creator, and to the Christ, and to the Holy Spirit.

Blessing of the Water

ONE: We give you thanks, almighty God and Creator, for by the gift of water you nourish and sustain all living things.

MANY: Blessed be God forever.

ONE: We give you thanks that through the waters of the Red Sea, you led your people out of slavery to freedom in the promised land.

MANY: Blessed be God forever.

ONE: We give you thanks for sending your Son Jesus. For he was baptized by John in the river Jordan. For us he was anointed as Christ by your Holy Spirit. For us he suffered the baptism of his own death and resurrection, setting us free from the bondage of sin and death, and opening to us the joy and freedom of everlasting life.

MANY: Blessed be God forever.

ONE: We give you thanks for your Holy Spirit who teaches us and leads us into all truth, filling us with his gifts so that we might proclaim the gospel to all nations and serve you as a royal priesthood.

MANY: Blessed be God forever.

The water is blessed, three times, with the sign of the Cross or with a Cross dipped in the water; each time the following is said:

ONE: Now sanctify this water, we pray you, by the power of your Holy Spirit. Almighty and Merciful God, in the Baptism of your Son, you have restored Creation and fulfilled it as a means of salvation. Show this water to be the water of redemption and the purification of flesh and spirit, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

MANY: Great are You, O Lord, and marvelous are Your works, and no word will suffice to praise Your wonders.

FIRST READER: Today the grace of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove dwelt upon the waters. Today the Sun that never sets has dawned and the world is made radiant with the light of the Lord.

SECOND READER: Today the Moon with its radiant beams sheds light on the world. Today the stars formed of light make the inhabited world lovely with the brightness of their splendor.

FIRST READER: Today the clouds rain down from heaven the shower of justice for all people. Today the Uncreated by his own will accepts the laying on of hands by his own creature.

SECOND READER: Today the Prophet and Forerunner draws near, but stands by with fear, seeing God's compassion towards us. Today the streams of Jordan are changed into healing by the presence of the Lord.

FIRST READER: Today all creation is watered by mystical streams. Today the failings of humanity are being washed away by the waters of Jordan.

SECOND READER: Today Paradise is opened for mortals and the Sun of justice shines down on us. Today the bitter water as once for Moses' people is changed to sweetness by the presence of the Lord.

FIRST READER: Today we have been delivered from the ancient grief, and saved as the new Israel. Today we have been redeemed from darkness and are filled with radiance by the light of the knowledge of God.

SECOND READER: Today the gloomy fog of the world is cleansed by the manifestation of our God. Today all creation shines with light from on high.

FIRST READER: Today error has been destroyed and the coming of the Master makes for us a way of salvation. Today things on high keep festival with those below, and those below commune with those on high.

SECOND READER: Today the sacred and triumphant festal assembly of the Church exults. Today the Master hastens towards baptism, that he may lead humanity to the heights.

FIRST READER: Today the One who does not bow bows down to his own servant, that he may free us from servitude. Today we have purchased the Commonwealth of Heaven, for the Reign of the Lord will have no end.

MANY: Today earth and sea share the joy of the world, and the world has been filled with gladness.

(The blessing above is from the Anglican Church of Canada.)

Closing Hymn

"The One Who Taught Beside the Sea"

Words: John Thornburg, 2003

Music: Wyeth's Repository of Sacred Music,
(Part second, 1813)

Harmony by Kathleen Grace, 2008

Tune: GARDEN HYMN

Celebrating Grace Hymnal #153

Benediction

As you leave this place, may you feel God's overwhelming grace, and may it flow like a river within you and outward to those around you.



Benediction



Capella

by C. W. Christian

Bright sister of Pleiades,
Sweet limpid, pulsing butter star,
Hung from the cold November trees,
Come from the mists where now you are.
Clamber up to a nobler height,
Into the clear, crisp air above.
Lume as before the purple night;
Rekindle in us forgotten love.
Tell of a brighter hope that lies
Still in the mist below our sight.
Be harbinger of Christmas skies:
Promise us light. Promise us light!

—C. W. (Wally) Christian is a retired theology professor from Baylor University and a longtime poet. Many of his poems have illuminated the pages of Seeds publications over the past 20 years. About "Capella," he writes: "Capella is the first to appear in the great spangle of stars that grace the heavens at Christmas. It has always been for me a personal symbol of hope."