

Harbinger of Hope



Worship Resources for the Creative Church • Advent/Christmastide 2016

Dedicated to C. W. (Wally) Christian

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



Worship Tools for the Creative Church

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).

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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.

Harbinger of Hope

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For 23 years, the group has sought out people of faith who feel called to care for the poor; and to affirm, enable and empower a variety of responses to the problems of hunger and poverty.

Editorial Address

The Seeds of Hope ministry is housed by the community of faith at Seventh & James Baptist Church. The mailing address is: 602 James; Waco, TX 76706; Phone: 254/755-7745; Fax: 254/753-1909; E-mail: seededitor1@gmail.com. Web address: www.seedspublishers.org. Copyright © 2016.

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A Word about This Packet

This worship packet comes to you with a theme that is profoundly special to us. The liturgies and weeks are arranged around the Advent poetry of C. W. (Wally) Christian, a beloved theology professor who had been retired for a number of years from Baylor University before his death last Nov. 30th—the first day of Advent 2015.

Wally was generous to Seeds in many ways. Longtime subscribers of *Sacred Seasons*—as well as *Seeds Magazine*, *Sprouts* and *Hunger News & Hope*—will have seen his exquisite poetry. He gave us unilateral approval to print any of his works—poetry or not—that caught our editorial eyes. At his death, his family designated Seeds as the recipient of memorial gifts.

He also had a deeper, less visible effect on the Seeds publications—especially the worship resources, because he was my theology professor. Those classes took place 40 years ago, but they were vastly formative, and, since he was a member of Seventh & James Baptist Church—my church—I saw him often and have sought his wisdom about theological and spiritual questions during all of these years.

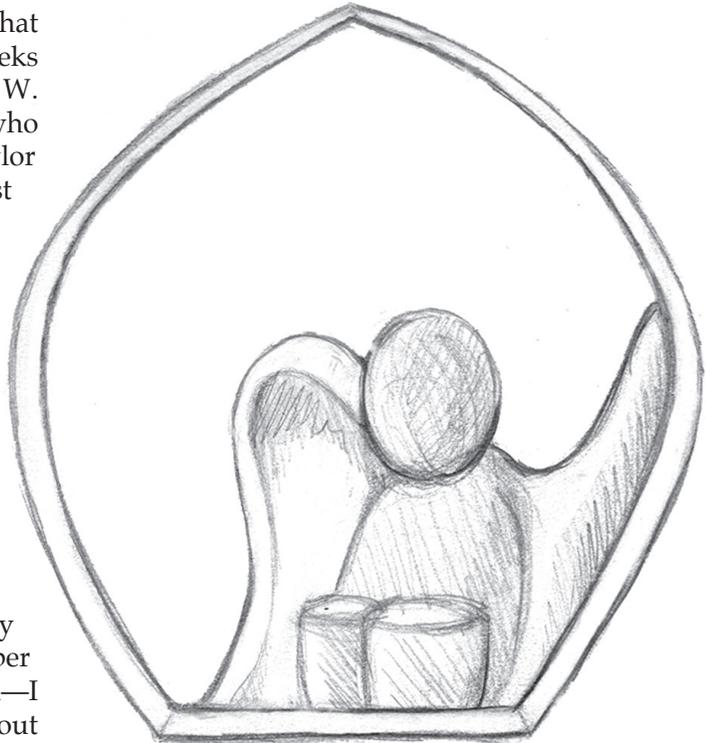
A team of brainstormers (including Derek Dodson, Jake Raabe and Guilherme Almeida) combed through Wally's beautiful *Wreath of Songs for Advent & Christmastide*, a collection of poetry. We picked out a number of poems to share with you here, all the while wishing that we could share more of them.

We also organized the four Advent weeks according to his themes: the Prophets' candle, the Bethlehem candle, the Shepherd's candle and the Angel's candle.

Our own Slogan Queen, Deborah Harris, in the midst of serious illness, looked through Wally's poetry and chose "Harbinger of Hope" for our title. It is inspired by the poem "Capella," where he invokes that star to be the "harbinger of Christmas skies."

Much of the art in this packet is comprised of drawings of a wooden crèche that Wally carved over the years. His family allowed us to borrow it so that Sally Lynn Askins, our resident artist, could draw the pieces. We think the result is stunning—and there are somewhat unexpected theological treasures within the crèche as well.

In this packet, we introduce Kristin Mercer, who works for a local anti-poverty organization. We are looking forward to more from Kristin in the future.



art by Sally Lynn Askins

We are deeply indebted to those folks who keep lending us their writings and art, knowing they will receive no monetary reward. We are grateful for the congregation at Seventh & James Baptist Church, which has housed the Seeds ministry for 25 years, and for all of you who have kept the ministry going for all these years—literally against all odds. We are also deeply grateful for all of you who subscribe to *Sacred Seasons*, and who make use of these gifts in your worship and work.

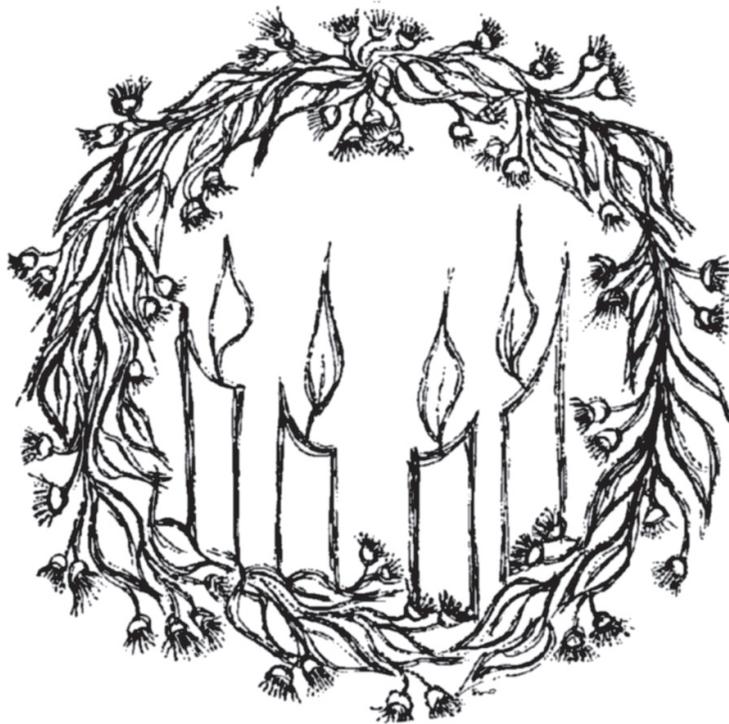
As always, we want you to feel free to play around with these resources, and adapt them to your congregation's needs and resources. If you come up with something creative and different, we would love to hear about it.

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 find your way through a hopeful Advent and Christmastide.

—Gratefully,
Katie Cook, on behalf of the
Seeds staff and Council of Stewards

Advent: A Tutorial

by C. W. Christian



The Prophet's candle speaks
of those who came;
The Beth'lem candle glows with steady flame;
The Shepherd's candle warms
the gloomy night;
The Angel's candle floods the heavens
with light;
The Christ candle sheds a lambent ray
That marks our path into the Holy Day.

art by Susan Daily, BVM

A Liturgy for the First Sunday in Advent

by Katie Cook & Guilherme Almeida

Call to Worship

ONE: Come, true light. Come, life eternal. Come, hidden mystery.

MANY: Come, treasure beyond worth.

ONE: Come, reality beyond words. Come, you who are beyond all understanding.

ALL: Come, rejoicing without end.

ONE: Come, light that knows no evening. Come, unfailing expectation.

MANY: Come, you who lift up the fallen.

ALL: Come, creator of new life; you make all things new.

ONE: Come, all-powerful one. Come, invisible, all-seeing one.

ALL: Come, for you are always unmoved, yet you are always moving.

ONE: You draw near to those who suffer, yet you are higher than the heavens.

MANY: Come, for your name fills our hearts with longing and is ever on our lips.

ALL: Come, you who are unfathomable and yet friend of the lonely.

ONE: Come, for you are yourself the desire that is in our hearts.

MANY: Come, consolation of our souls.

ALL: Come, our joy, our endless delight.

—Adapted from Hymns of Divine Love by Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022)

Processional Hymn

“Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus”

WORDS: Charles Wesley, 1744

MUSIC: Rowland H. Prichard, 1830

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Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 83

Lighting the Prophets' candle

ONE: God's grace is here, now, in the midst of us.

MANY: God offers salvation to all people.

ONE: Let us spend our lives well as we wait for the blessed hope, the gift of God.

MANY: We wait now for the Christ Child to appear in his glory.

Someone lights the first candle.

ONE: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

—From Titus 2:11 and Romans 15:13

Invocation

Reading from the Prophets

Isaiah 2:1-5



art by Sally Lynn Askins

Meditation

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light” (Isaiah 9:2). The message of the prophet is a message for the people, a message sent into the camps of the exiled, and into the slums of the poor. It is a word against the captains of the arms industry and the fanatics of power. If we really understood what it means, it bursts the bonds of Sunday worship. For if this message really lays hold of us, it leads us to Jesus the liberator, and to the people who live in darkness and who are waiting for him--and for us.

—Jurgen Moltmann, *The Power of the Powerless*

Song of Hope

“There Is a Hope So Sure”

WORDS & MUSIC: Graham Kendrick

CCLI Song No. 3501481

Reading from the Psalms

Psalms 122

Meditation

The Hebrew prophets invited God’s people to celebrate even when things were at their worst. Six hundred years before the first Christmas, Israel was in terrible shape. Assyria, the latest in a long line of super powers, was threatening. The prophet Zephaniah pointed out how bad things were. He criticized their religious foolishness, hypocritical leaders and the way they ignored God...yet the prophet finds hope. He concludes his book with this glorious song, this call to celebrate God’s presence: “Come, worship, sing, shout, rejoice with all your heart. For no matter what comes, God is with you. God sings and dances. God celebrates the poor being loved, the outcasts being welcomed, and the journey home that we all share.”

—Brett Younger, “Joy for Everyone”

Reading from the Epistles

Romans 13:8-14

Hymn of Assurance

“We Are Singing, for the Lord Is Our Light”

WORDS: South African; tr. Hal Hopson, 1994

MUSIC: Zulu melody; adapt. Hal Hopson, 1994

SIYAHAMBA Irregular Meter

Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 155

Gospel Reading

Matthew 24: 36-44

I Am Waiting

A meditation by Brett Younger

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

Lawrence Ferlinghetti writes:

I am waiting for a rebirth of wonder,
and I am waiting for the Age of Anxiety to drop dead...

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

I am waiting to get some intimations of immortality by
recollecting my early childhood
and I am waiting for the green mornings to come again...
And I am waiting perpetually and forever a renaissance of
wonder.

The poet reminds me that:

I am waiting for the moment when I become the person I
keep thinking I should be,
and I am waiting to feel no need for the approval of others.
I am waiting to truly want the needy to have what I
grudgingly give,
and I am waiting to love other children with the love I have
for my own.

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

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

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

—Brett Younger is pastor of Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, NY,
and a longtime contributor to Seeds publications.

Christmas, 2007

*(News Item: The suicide bomber was
an eleven-year-old child.)*

New beginnings?
Who talks of new beginnings,
Choking on the fumes of cordite,
Weeping for little children
Made suicide to hatred and despair,
To old grudges, angry blood and death?
What darkness is this?
What will the daybreak bring?
Is not the earth in travail,
Gasping and heaving,
Ready to give birth? To what?
What shall be born to her?
What mocking laughter?
What shall be delivered to the morn?
Do we dare speak of new beginnings?
Lo! In the darkest hour of the night a child is born!
In the very face of ruin and wrack,
Born of the infant Jesus,
Comes innocence—and dreams.
Now, in the stench of burning flesh
We catch our breath.
Our lungs inhale sweet atmospheres again.
In the gloom of midnight hope sees a star
And listening love can hear the rustle of a wing.

Hosanna!

—C. W. Christian

Active Hope: A Meditation

by Kristin Mercer

Text: John 11:17-27

*Hope sees life not as what it is, but as what it could be.
Hope sees life not as what it is, but as what it should be.
Hope sees life not as what it is, but as what it will be.*

Hope will not allow the one who hopes to sit passively by, allowing the circumstances to remain as they were when they were encountered. Hope challenges until change becomes real.

When we read the story of the raising of Lazarus in John 11, we hear the despair in Martha's voice as she looked Jesus in the eye and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

How the world would be different if he hadn't let her down! If he had just shown up when he was supposed to, then her heart would not be rent in two by the death of her brother. Her brother would be alive and well.

But Martha's despair was not really just about the emotional hardship of losing someone she loved dearly. Emotional hardship is hard enough with the perennial feelings of loneliness and grief that will inevitably crop up, especially around the sacred holy days and festivals.

But Martha was also losing life as she had known it. She once had the kind of home that could welcome people in with hospitality at the grace of Lazarus' provision, but now she would be looking for the hospitality of others.

No woman could survive on her own in the ancient world. On the number line of power, she held the unenviable place of zero. She would have no other choice, but to beg or prostitute herself out to the men of the town.

She wasn't a young woman, so neither option would be a particularly prosperous engagement. She would most likely go hungry most days, and once the town turned her out of her home she would be sleeping on the streets.

Her station was gone. Her security was gone. And yet, she waited for the coming of Jesus, ever hopeful.

When Jesus finally arrived in town, she went out of her house and she met him. Her hope led to her action against the reality she saw looming ahead.

Passivity and hope cannot coexist.

This hope radically transformed Martha's life. She did not just change her own situation, but that of her

sister Mary also, and that of her entire neighborhood. She would keep her home clean, so that the strangers who passed through town might have a neat space to sleep. She would keep her kitchen stocked, so that the beggars would not have to fear where their next meal would come from.

Hope sees life not as it is, but as what it will be. *God, who awakens hope within us, may the hope within the Advent season challenge me to actively make this world a place that looks more like your kingdom. May I seek peace for all people. May I seek justice for the wronged. May I seek forgiveness for those who have done wrong. May I receive all that you have given me in gratefulness, so that I do not take it for granted but generously share it with everyone in need. Amen.*

—Kristin Mercer works as an administrative assistant at Mission Waco. A native of Belton, she recently graduated from George W. Truett Theological Seminary in Waco with a Master of Divinity degree. Her dream, she says, is to encourage literacy in low-income neighborhoods.



art by Erin Kennedy Mayer

A Liturgy for the Second Sunday in Advent

by Katie Cook & Guilherme Almeida

Call to Worship

ONE: With astonishment, fear and wonder, we are walking the road with Jesus;

MANY: We are walking the peaceful pathway; we are singing the coming kingdom.

ALL: For the kingdom is now upon us, and is coming in all its fullness.

ONE: It will raise up the poor and humble with compassion and love.

MANY: Hosanna!

ONE: Come and help us, O God!

MANY: Hosanna!

ONE: Come, deliver, O God!

MANY: Hosanna!

ONE: Give us courage and joy!

MANY: Hosanna!

— Adapted from a song by Andrew Donaldson

Processional Hymn

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

WORDS: Latin hymn;

tr. John Mason Neale (sts. 1,2), 1851;

Henry Sloane Coffin (sts. 3,4), 1916

MUSIC: Plainsong; adapt. Thomas Helmore, 1854

VENI EMMANUEL LM with refrain

Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 79

Lighting the Bethlehem candle

ONE: God’s grace is here, now, in the midst of us.

MANY: God offers salvation to all.

ONE: Let us live our lives as we wait for the blessed hope God has given us.

MANY: We are waiting for the Christ Child to appear in his glory.

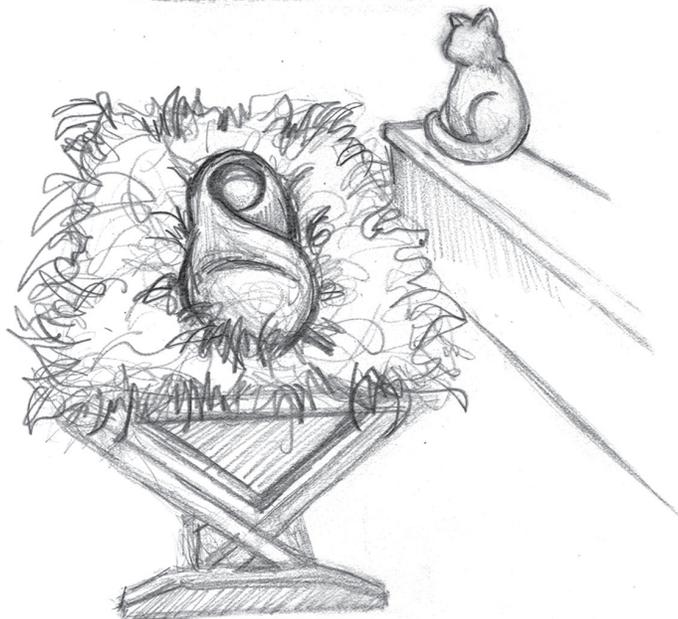
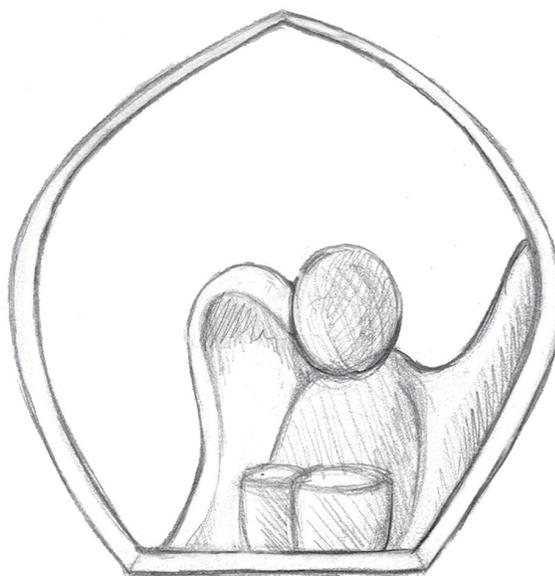
Someone lights the first candle.

ONE: We are one in this journey of expectation.

MANY: You see into our hearts and reach out to save us where we are.

ONE: Reveal to us the love we long to know.

MANY: Remind us that love is on the way.



art by Sally Lynn Askins

ALL: Help us celebrate the love that is our Lord.

Someone lights the second candle.

ONE: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

—Adapted from Titus 2:11 and Romans 15:13

Meditation

Bethlehem. The angelic choir's announcement of peace on earth can be trusted because the one born in the stable is anointed to bring good news to the poor, release to the slave, sight to the blind, and liberation to the oppressed. The warrior-king has come. He engaged the conflict of a recalcitrant world, his weapon was a cross and his reward was a kingdom. It is and will be a kingdom of peace, forged in the furnace of conflict of suffering.

—James Kennedy

Reading from the Prophets

Isaiah 11:1-10

Reading from the Psalms

Psalms 72 or 72:1-8

Reading from the Epistles

Romans 15:4-13

Meditation

For outlandish creatures like us, on our way to a heart, a brain, and courage, Bethlehem is not the end of our journey but only the beginning—not home but the place through which we must pass if ever we are to reach home at last.

—Frederick Buechner

Hymn of Preparation

“People, Look East”

WORDS: Eleanor Farjeon, 1928

MUSIC: French folk melody;

harm. Shelby Trapp, 2008

BESANÇON 8.7.9.8.8.7

Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 90

Reading from the Gospels

Matthew 3:1-12

O Little Town of Bethlehem

lyrics by Ken Sehested

Editor's note: in April 2002, Ken Sehested was part of a Christian Peacemaker Teams delegation visiting the Israeli-occupied West Bank near Jerusalem. The group took refuge on the campus of Bethlehem University after being stopped by Israeli soldiers while attempting to walk into the city of Bethlehem. While waiting there, he wrote these lyrics:

O wounded town of Bethlehem
How sad we see thee cry
Above thy curfewed, empty streets
The belching tanks roll by.

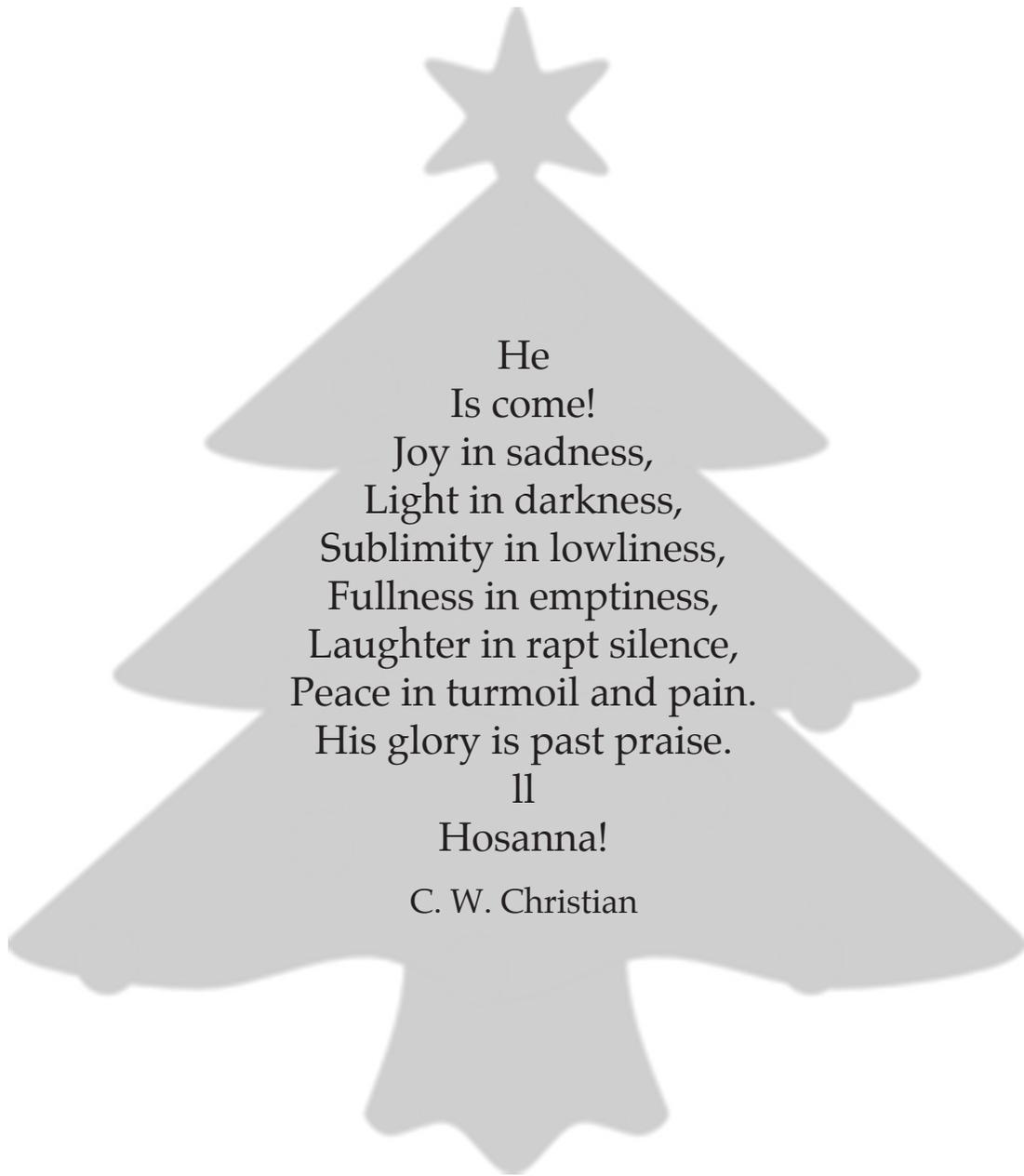
Yet from deep memory springeth
The hope of all the years
God's kingdom come
God's will be done
On earth, relieved of tears.

Tune: ST. LOUIS



art by Erin Kennedy Mayer

Ken Sehested was a founding Seeds editor. The lyrics above are from his website, prayer&politiks (prayerandpolitiks.org), and are reprinted with permission.



He
Is come!
Joy in sadness,
Light in darkness,
Sublimity in lowliness,
Fullness in emptiness,
Laughter in rapt silence,
Peace in turmoil and pain.
His glory is past praise.

||

Hosanna!

C. W. Christian

A Liturgy for the Third Sunday in Advent

by Katie Cook & Guilherme Almeida

Call to Worship

O Savior Christ,
in whose way of life lies the secret of all life,
and the hopes of all the people,
we pray for quiet courage to meet this hour.
We did not choose to be born or to live
in such an age.

But let its problems challenge us,
its discoveries exhilarate us,
its injustice anger us,
its possibilities inspire us,
and its vigor renew us,
for Your Kingdom's sake.

—From Bangladesh, Anonymous

Processional Hymn

"Tell Out, My Soul"

WORDS: Timothy Dudley-Smith,
1961 (Luke 1:46-55)

MUSIC: Henry W. Greatorex, 1919, alt.
WOODLANDS 10.10.10.10

Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 94

Lighting the Shepherd's candle

ONE: God's grace is here, now, in the midst
of us.

MANY: God offers salvation to all.

ONE: Let us live our lives as we wait for the
blessed hope God has given us.

MANY: We are waiting for the Christ Child to
appear in his glory.

Someone lights the first and second candles.

ONE: We are one in this journey of
expectation.

MANY: You see into our hearts and reach out
to save us where we are.

ONE: Reveal to us the love we long to know.

MANY: Remind us that love is on the way.

ALL: Help us celebrate the love that is our
Lord.

Someone lights the third candle.

ONE: May the God of hope fill you with all joy
and peace in believing, so that you may
abound in hope by the power of the Holy
Spirit.

—Adapted from Titus 2:11 and Romans 15:13

Reading from the Prophets

Isaiah 35:1-10



art by Sally Lynn Askins

Meditation

They were first scared out of their wits; we must never forget that. “Sore afraid” is how the King James translation renders it, and that was a natural reaction to what they saw and heard, a human reaction. Some of those who received the message never got past the fear. It would have been easy to stay scared. But with the shepherds, other emotions got involved. Maybe they were simple folk, uneducated. Perhaps their knowledge of theology was inexact. But their hearts were open, and they responded to the message. They left their flocks—their livelihoods—and hurried away to see the message in the flesh.

—Greg Garret

Hymn of Joy

“Hail to the Lord’s Anointed”

WORDS: James Montgomery,
1822 (Ps. 72)

MUSIC: English melody, 17th cent.

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Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 98

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 146

(or Luke 1:46b-55)

Meditation

Only a handful of shepherds, poor boys working a minimum wage job watching someone else’s sheep overnight, saw the star and heard the singing of angels. Those who had eyes to see saw. Those who had ears to hear heard. That is the way it always is when God moves in the human realm.

—Richard Groves

Reading from the Epistles

James 5:7-10

Hymn of Adoration

“Of the Father’s Love Begotten”

WORDS: Aurelius Clemens Prudentius, 4th cent.;
tr. John Mason Neale, 1854

and Henry W. Baker, 1859

MUSIC: Plainsong melody, 13th cent.;

harm. Andrew Daniels, 2008

DIVINUM MYSTERIUM 8.7.8.7.8.7.7.

Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 113

Reading from the Gospels

Matthew 11:2-11



art by Sally Lynn Askins

Sing Bright Seraphs

The night is dark and cold
On these bare, stony hills.
Nothing to shield me from the wind.
It gusts and ruffles my campfire
And scatters the paltry flame
Before my feet can feel its heat.
A curse on my profession!
Profession? Ha!
It should be women’s work.
Something is troubling the sheep.
I see their dark shapes moving
Against the faint glow of the town.
I believe I’ll move up-wind.
You’d suppose in all these years
I’d be accustomed to their smell.
I doze a bit,
But what they pay me for is watching.
Why? Nothing ever happens
In this god-forsaken place.
—C. W. Christian

That Time We Saw the Angels

A Monologue for Children

by Crystal Goolsby

Scripture: Luke 2:8-20, NIV

Setting: A field. The shepherd is dressed in peasant garments. You might consider a painted backdrop showing sheep on a hillside at night, or a dark room with stars projected on the wall.

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

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

The angel said, "Do not be afraid. I bring you news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David"—he meant Bethlehem—"a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord." What? The Christ? That meant that he was the long-awaited Messiah. Our people were promised a long, long time ago that the Messiah would come and deliver us from our enemies, and would bring peace to all the world. Could this be the time?

The angel said, "This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

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

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

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

I had to go. I had to find this child. I had to see if it was true. We jumped on our donkeys and rode as fast as we could toward the town of David. We didn't even have to direct them. They seemed as excited as we were, and they seemed to know exactly where to go.

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

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

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

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

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

—Crystal Goolsby is a freelance writer in Austin, TX and a former Seeds of Hope intern.

Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings

One response was given by the innkeeper when Mary and Joseph wanted to find a room where the Child could be born. The innkeeper was not hostile; he was not opposed to them, but his inn was crowded; his hands were full; his mind was preoccupied. This is the answer that millions are giving today. Like a Bethlehem innkeeper, they cannot find room for Christ. All the accommodations in their hearts are already taken up by other crowding interests. Their response is not atheism. It is not defiance. It is preoccupation and the feeling of being able to get on reasonably well without Christianity.
—Billy Graham

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

As we journey week by week through Advent, we come to the realization that we could never find our way to hope, peace or joy without love. Love opens our minds and hearts to all that is holy and shows us who we are meant to be. In her book *Opening to Miracles*, Betty Clare Moffatt writes, "Practicing the presence of love changes your perceptions. And changing your perceptions creates miracles around you." Love has never been more *present* than in the birth of Jesus. Love made flesh, swaddled, and placed in our arms. To this world fractured by fear and hate and greed and

despair, the Creator responds, not with punishment or judgment, but with love. Love is born, and when we are graced to love, we are born anew.
—Deborah E. Harris



Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silent

lyrics by Ken Sehested

Favor and affection contending
'Til the work of wrath confess
Steadfast love and faith embracing
Righteousness and peace caress
Magi wend their way to advent star aligned
Dwelling place of God earth-consigned

Wolf and lamb now linger, contented
Calf and lion peaceful arrayed
Cow and bear graze restful and fearless
Little child now marshaling parade
Roots from severed tree erupt, oh meek proclaim
Holy Mountain's knowledge and Name

Tune: PICARDY

Ken Sehested was a founding Seeds editor. The lyrics above are from his website, prayer&politiks (prayerandpolitiks.org), and are reprinted with permission.

A Liturgy for the Fourth Sunday in Advent

by Katie Cook & Guilherme Almeida

Call to Worship

ONE: Break forth, O beauteous heavenly light,
and usher in the morning;

MANY: You shepherds, shrink not with affright,
but hear the angel's warning.

ALL: This child, now weak in infancy, our
confidence and joy shall be, the power
of Satan breaking, our peace eternal
making.

—From the Chorale *Ermuntre dich*

Processional Hymn

"Once in Royal David's City"

IRBY Irregular meter

Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 104

WORDS: Cecil F. Alexander, 1848,
alt. (Luke 2:7)

MUSIC: Henry J. Gauntlett, 1849;
harm. David Schwoebel, 2009

Lighting the Angel's candle

ONE: God's grace is here, now, in the midst of
us.

MANY: God offers salvation to all.

ONE: Let us live our lives as we wait for the
blessed hope God has given us.

MANY: We are waiting for the Christ Child to
appear in his glory.

Someone lights the first, second and third candles.

ONE: We are one in this journey of expectation.

MANY: You see into our hearts and reach out to
save us where we are.

ONE: Reveal to us the love we long to know.

MANY: Remind us that love is on the way.

ALL: Help us celebrate the love that is our
Lord.

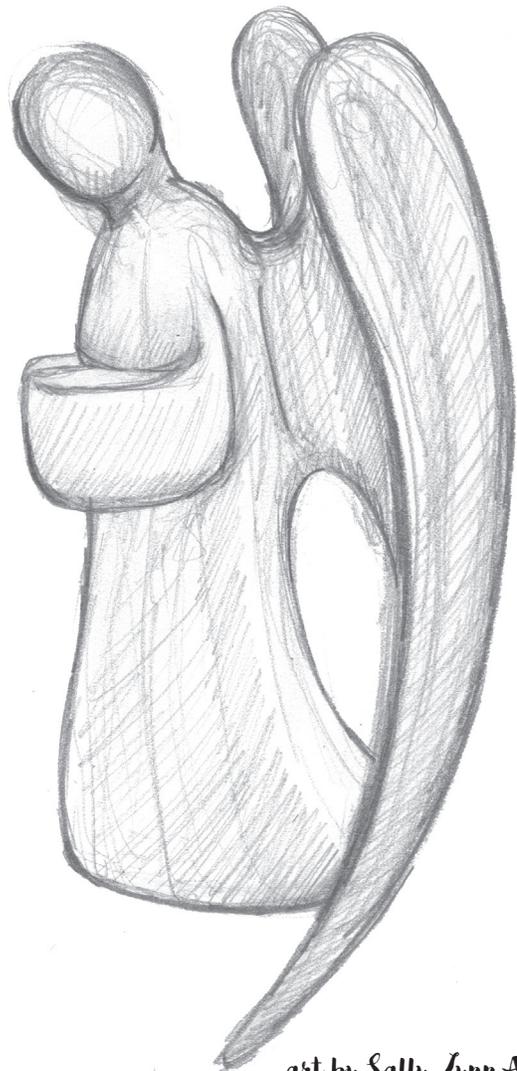
MANY: Encourage us to embrace your abundant
joy.

ALL: Remind us that the joy of the Lord makes
us strong.

ONE: O Holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to
us, we pray;

MANY: Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in
us today!

ALL: We hear the Christmas angels the great
glad tidings tell; O come to us, abide with
us, our Lord Emmanuel!



art by Sally Lynn Askins

Someone lights the fourth candle.

ONE: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

—From *Titus 2:11, Nehemiah 8:10, Romans 15:13, and Phillips Brooks' "O Little Town of Bethlehem" (1868)*

Reading from the Prophets

Isaiah 7:10-16

Meditation

For lo! the days are hastening on,
by prophet seen of old,
when with the ever-circling years
shall come the time foretold
when peace shall over all the earth
its ancient splendors fling,
and the whole world send back
the song
which now the angels sing.
—Edmund H. Sears

Hymn of Proclamation

"El Mensaje Que Hoy
Proclamamos (The Message We
Now Are Proclaiming)"
WORDS and MUSIC: Eleazar
Torreglosa, tr. Betty Arendt
*Hosanna! Ecumenical Songs for
Justice*
and Peace No. 46

Reading from the Psalms

Psalms 80:1-7, 17-19

Meditation

Come, angelic envoys,
With renewed announcement
of glory (to God) and
peace (for the earth).
Your people long for Messiah's
rejoinder,
through wombs made welcome
to the news of reversal:
the annulment of enmity
and the Advent of promise.
—Ken Sehested, "Advent
Longing"

Reading from the Epistles:

Romans 1:1-7

Hymn of Peace

"Comfort, Comfort Ye My People"

WORDS: Johannes Olearius, 1671; tr.
Catherine Winkworth, 1863,
alt. (Isaiah 40:1-5)

MUSIC: *Geneva Psalter*, 1551

PSALM 42 8.7.8.7.7.8.8

Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 89

Reading from the Gospels

Matthew 1:18-25



Capella

Bright sister of the 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!

Capella is the first to appear, in the fall, of the great spangle
of first-magnitude stars that grace the heavens at Christmas.

It has always been for me a personal symbol of hope.

—C. W. Christian

Joseph's Dilemma: A Sermon

by Erin Conaway

Text: Matthew 1:18-25

What do you do when you don't know what to do? In Europe, a woman was near death from a special kind of cancer. There was one drug that the doctors thought might save her. It was a form of radium that a druggist in the same town had recently discovered.

The drug was expensive to make, but the druggist was charging 10 times what the drug cost him to make. He paid \$200 for the radium and charged \$2,000 for a small dose of the drug.

The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money, but he could only get together about \$ 1,000, which would be half of what it cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying and asked him to sell it cheaper or let him pay later.

But the druggist said, "No, I discovered the drug and I'm going to make money from it." So Heinz got desperate and broke into the man's store to steal the drug for his wife.

Should the husband have done that?

This is known as the Heinz Dilemma, for obvious reasons.

In our Gospel reading, we find that Joseph was in the middle of his own Heinz Dilemma. He and Mary were betrothed, or engaged, as the NRSV translates it. As you've all heard before, the betrothal period in first-

century Middle Eastern Jewish culture was the pre-marriage agreement between a father and the man who would take his daughter.

Now you have to try to suspend all of the thinking you currently have about engagements and love and elaborate asking rituals with rings and bended knees and candle-lit dinners. This was a business transaction that did not require nor take into account the consent, or even the wishes, of the bride-to-be. In some cases, a woman could find herself betrothed to a man she'd never talked to before.

We hear this and tend to think of this as a dating time—when the lucky couple could fall madly

in love or realize that they weren't compatible and decide to go their separate ways. But that's just not the case. The only way a betrothal could be broken was through a divorce.

And the assumption was that, if a man and a woman spent any time alone together, they were going to engage in marital relations, so they were not allowed to be alone with one another to have those long talks and to gaze lovingly into their betrothed's eyes. This really was a business transaction and there was a great deal of honor at stake in the way it all happened.

For Mary to turn up pregnant brought shame



art by Jesse Manning

to her father's household. Money would have already changed hands between Joseph and Mary's father, and that money would have to be returned.

Plus, Mary would now be the responsibility of her father and it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to betroth her away again because of her dishonorable actions. If her father had been able to find someone to take her, she would no longer bring any kind of desirable dowry or bride price, because the assumption was that she was no longer a virgin.

There is a great deal of research out there about how we process the decisions in our lives and why we make this decision rather than that one.

This would have been a slap in the face for Joseph as well. He'd acted in good faith with her father and now he was not getting what he bargained for, to be totally crass about it. The issues of betrayal of trust and embarrassment were all swirling about and Matthew's Gospel makes it seem as if Joseph really struggled with his decision. He wasn't immediately sure what to do.

There is a great deal of research out there about how we process the decisions in our lives and why we make this decision rather than that one. Lawrence Kohlberg was a professor in the Psychology Department at the University of Chicago and at the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University. He is known for his theory of the stages of moral development.

He interviewed children and began with the Heinz Dilemma. Kohlberg wanted to know why the children and teens answered the question the way they did about Mr. Heinz breaking into the store and stealing the medicine. As he listened and thought, he developed his theory of the stages of moral development and expanded on the work that others had done before him.

(Preacher disclaimer here—I am not a psychologist nor the son of a psychologist, so the things I'm about to describe to you come from some very preliminary research into Kohlberg, just because it caught my fancy this week.)

Stage 1 is sometimes labeled "Obedience and Punishment Orientation, in which "the child assumes

that powerful authorities hand down a fixed set of rules which he or she must unquestioningly obey."

So they will say that Heinz was wrong to take the medicine because stealing is against the rules or against the law. When asked to unpack that more, they will refer to Heinz getting in trouble. "Stealing is bad because you get in trouble," they will say.

Morality is something external to the children in this stage. Joseph knew what the law said: upon finding out that Mary was pregnant, he was supposed to divorce her either publicly or in the presence of two witnesses.

Roman law treated a husband who failed to divorce an unfaithful wife as a panderer who exploited his wife as a prostitute. Joseph would have been looked down on in society if he let something get in the way of maintaining his honor. The rules said Joseph was supposed to divorce Mary.

Stage 2 for Kohlberg is sometimes called the "Individualism and Exchange" stage. At this stage, children recognize that there is not just one right view that is handed down by the authorities. Different individuals have different viewpoints. So they might think it was right for Heinz to take the medicine, but wrong for the druggist to have it taken from him.

There is also the notion of fair deals or exchanges—Heinz tried to offer a fair price for the drug, but the druggist wanted something that wasn't fair, therefore it was okay for Heinz to take it from him. Joseph could consider that he didn't get a fair deal for his money. The exchange was a certain price for a woman who would be his bride.

Now she was pregnant—he could only assume by another man; therefore he was not getting a faithful wife. So it would only stand to reason that he divorce her and send her back to her father. The shame Mary was bringing to him wasn't fair, because he had acted honorably up to this point. It would only be fair to let the majority of the shame fall to her. He should do whatever it took to even the score or make the deal right.

Stage 3 is called "Good Interpersonal Relationships." At this stage children—who are by now usually entering their teens—see morality as more than simple deals. They believe that people should live up to the expectations of the family and community and behave in "good" ways.

Good behavior means having good motives and interpersonal feelings such as love, empathy, trust, and concern for others. They would say that Heinz was being good in that he wanted to save the life of

another person, especially his wife. They would also say that the druggist was bad because he was selfish and greedy and not caring about others. Therefore, it was right for Heinz to take the medicine because he was being good and acting against someone who was being bad.

The assumption in Stage 3 is that the attitudes of good and bad are shared by the entire community. We all know what's right and what's wrong. It was right for Joseph to treat Mary with honor and dignity. It was wrong for her to get pregnant before they were married. It would only be right for Joseph to divorce her and send her back...that was the good thing to do in this situation. She was bad; he must continue to be good for both of their sakes.

Stage 4 is called "Maintaining the Social Order." Stage 3 reasoning works best in two-person relationships with family members or close friends, where one can make a real effort to get to know the other's feelings and needs and try to help. At Stage 4, in contrast, the respondent becomes more broadly concerned with *society as a whole*.

Now the emphasis is on obeying laws, respecting authority and performing one's duties, so that the social order is maintained. In response to the Heinz story, many subjects say they understand that Heinz's motives were good, but they cannot condone the theft. What would happen if we all started breaking the laws whenever we felt we had a good reason? The result would be chaos; society couldn't function.

The answers are very similar to Stage 1, but they don't come from an outside authority; they are conceived by the individual. If Joseph keeps Mary, then he's perpetrating a lie, acting as if the baby is his. This is indirectly condoning sex before marriage and setting a bad example to the community. Or worse, he's saying that fidelity to one's spouse is not an ideal to be held to with rigor and absoluteness.

You can't let this kind of thing pass without consequences. What would happen if we all disregarded the business deals our fathers made with regard to their daughters? If a man's wife isn't his and his alone, then what is? Can you just go sit in his chair or eat his fattened calf when you feel like it? We have these rules and rituals for a reason. Betrothal means something. It's sacred. You can't just let this go. The rules must hold. Divorce is Joseph's only real option.

Stage 5 is the "Social Contract and Individual Rights Stage." At Stage 4, people want to keep society functioning. However, a smoothly functioning

society is not necessarily a good one. A totalitarian society might be well organized, but it is hardly the moral ideal.

At Stage 5, people begin to ask, "What makes for a good society?" They begin to think about society in a very theoretical way, stepping back from their own context and considering the rights and values that a society ought to uphold. Stage 5 respondents

You can't let this kind of thing pass without consequences. What would happen if we all disregarded the business deals our fathers made with regard to their daughters? If a man's wife isn't his and his alone, then what is?

basically believe that a good society is best conceived as a social contract into which people freely enter to work toward the benefit of all.

They recognize that different social groups within a society will have different values, but they believe that all rational people would agree on two points. First, they would all want certain basic *rights*, such as liberty and life, to be protected. Second, they would want some *democratic* procedures for changing unfair law and for improving society.

While we value life over property, we do have these agreed-upon rules in place. They may need to be changed, so that sick people can get the medicine they need to make them well, but we have to decide these things as a group...together. Joseph may think that women ought to have some say in whom they marry. Perhaps that's what Mary was doing when she got pregnant by someone else—acting on her desire to have the mate of her choice, rather than the one her father selected for her.

But these are the rules we have until we change them. If we're going to change them, then we must do that together. For now, the thing to do is to get a divorce, but quietly, because maybe Mary didn't want this for her life and why cause her further hardship? The law must be held, but it can be held with gentle and kind hands that see a bigger picture at work. And this is where Joseph landed...keeping the law, maintaining his own righteousness, but also

trying to find a way to do that without exposing Mary to public disgrace.

But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."

Stage 6 is called "Universal Principles." Stage 5 respondents are working toward a conception

When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel commanded him. What an understated act of remarkable faith in action.

of the good society. They suggest that we need to (a) protect certain individual rights and (b) settle disputes through democratic processes. However, democratic processes alone do not always result in outcomes that we intuitively sense are just. A majority, for example, may vote for a law that hinders a minority. Thus, Kohlberg believes that there must be a higher stage—Stage 6—which defines the principles by which we achieve justice.

This is the stage of civil disobedience. Martin Luther King argued that a commitment to justice carries with it an obligation to disobey unjust laws. He also saw the need for laws and the democratic process and was therefore willing to accept the penalties for his actions.

Joseph enacted his own civil disobedience after he hears God assure him in a dream that Mary is the faithful woman he was hoping to wed, and that God was demanding their lives of them for a much greater plan and purpose than he'd ever imagined.

When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel commanded him. What an understated act of remarkable faith in action. Joseph followed the dream God gave him and went against all of the cultural and legal norms of his day.

He maintained his righteousness, not because he did the right thing by law or by custom, or even by his own decision. He maintained his righteousness through civil disobedience, in response to God's call in his life. He saw a new way and he took a big risk to walk that path.

I like to think that having parents who were these kind of people—the kind who would disobey laws and customs in cases where they conflicted with God's current of love and redemption in the world—I like to think that having parents like this made it easier and perfectly natural for Jesus to say, "You've heard it said...but I say to you."

What is God saying to us in our dreams about the presence of Christ in the world—Emmanuel; God is with us. What is God saying about the kind of difference that should make in our own choices and actions? Are there ways opening up to us that lie outside of the cultural norms and even the current laws of our land, but are indeed our paths to take?

What do we do when we don't know what to do? My sisters and brothers, let us walk in the light that comes from God...listening to our dreams and the limitless possibilities to demonstrate God's love in our world...even when it breaks the rules. Amen.

—Erin Conaway is the pastor of Seventh & James Baptist Church in Waco, TX, where the Seeds ministry is housed. He has been extremely generous with us over the years with sermons, meditations, worship ideas, and barbecued pork.

As we stand now on the brink of Christmas,

let us seek for the stillness of which life the carol sings. It is not the empty stillness and loneliness which life sometimes thrusts upon us. It is the deep mystery of meaning that fills us with awe and presence and reawakens our hearts to love. Let us indeed be joyful, for Christmas is a time of joy! But joy is not always boisterous. Isn't it, at its best and most abiding, a solemn joy that stands with its eyes aglow and its tongue silenced before the mystery of the manger?

—C. W. Christian

Lessons & Carols for Christmas Eve

Meditation of Preparation

The Christ Candle is burning;
the hour draws near;
the stillness of the watchful night comes on us.
Hush! No idle words!
No tinkling sound of temple or bazaar!
Only deep silence!
Only the pregnant plentitude of mystery!
We stand with open mouths.
We cannot fathom how the Word again is
flesh and dwells among us.
—C. W. Christian

First Lesson

Isaiah 9:2-7

Lighting of the Prophet's Candle

Carol

"The People Who in Darkness Walked"

Text: David W. Music, 1998

(Isaiah 9:2, 6-7)

Music: Swedish melody, 17th century; harm.

David W. Music, 1998

Tune: BEREDEN VÄG FÖR HERRAN 8.7.8.7 with
refrain

Celebrating Grace #84

Second Lesson

Psalms 96

Third Lesson

Lighting of the Bethlehem Candle

Carol

"Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming"

Text: 15th cent. German; translated by Theodore
Baker

Music: Alte Catholische Geistliche Kirchengesang,
1599;

harmony by Michael Praetorius,
1609

Tune: ES IST EIN ROS, Meter: 76.76.676

Chalice Hymnal #160

Fourth Lesson

Luke 2:1-14, (15-20)

Lighting of the Shepherd's Candle

Fifth Lesson

Matthew 1:18-25

Lighting of the Angel's Candle

Carol

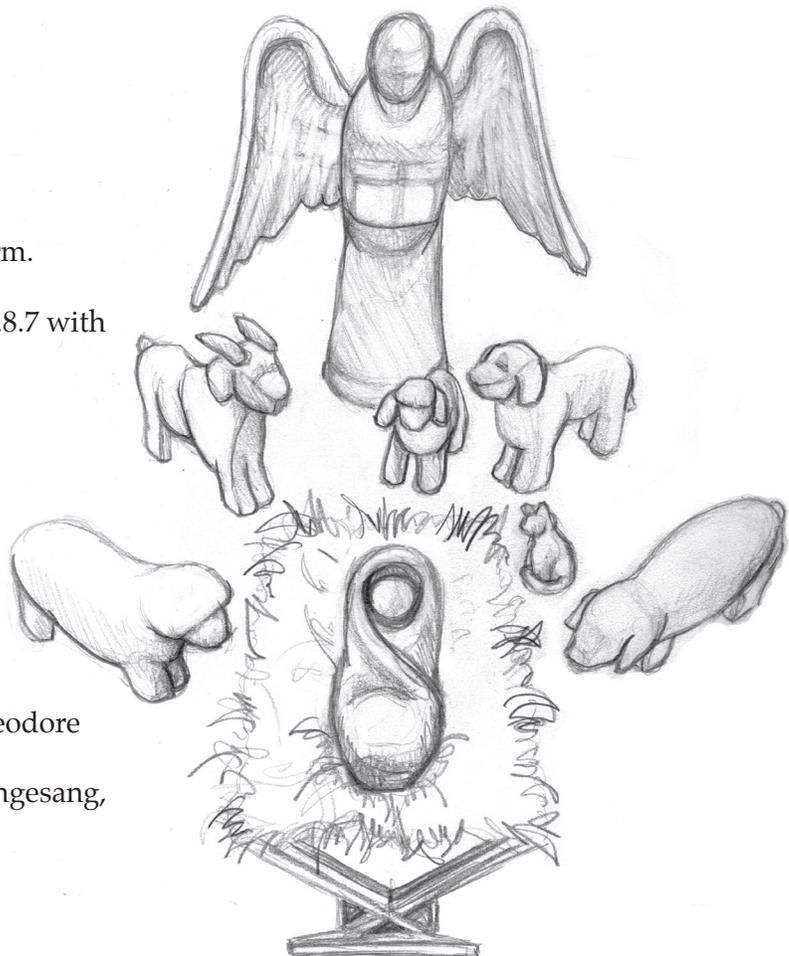
"Angels, From the Realms of Glory"

Words: James Montgomery, 1816

Music: Henry T. Smart, 1867

Tune: REGENT SQUARE

Chalice Hymnal #149



art by Sally Lynn Askins

Sixth Lesson

John 1:1-14

Lighting of the Christ Candle

Carol

“Silent Night, Holy Night”

Text: Joseph Mohr, circa 1816-1818;

trans. by John F. Young, 1820-1885

(stanzas 1, 2, 3) and anon.(stanza 4)

Music: Franz Gruber, circa 1820

Tune: STILLE NACHT, Meter: Irr.

Benediction

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.

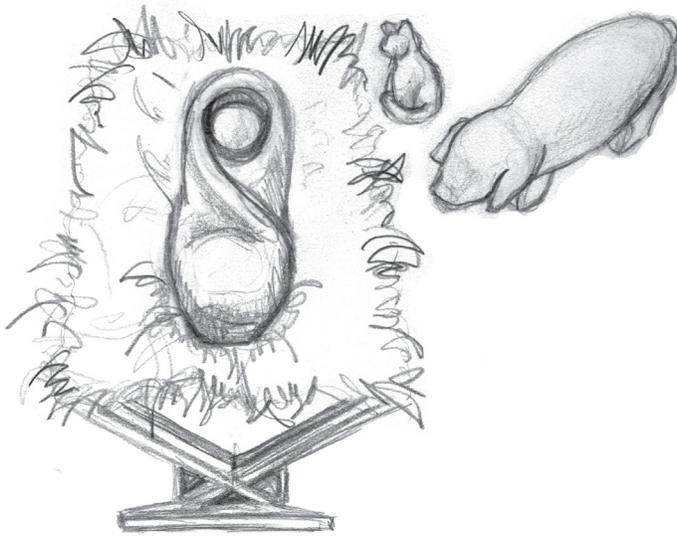
—Stormy Campbell

Incident at the Manger:

A Reading for Youth

from a C. W. Christian poem

art by Sally Lynn Askins



FIRST READER: The gray ass nodded as if in prayer, standing beside the brindled ox. An old bellwether ram was there and ewes with yearlings from the flocks.

SECOND READER: Dazed by the rare and radiant sight, they gasped and stopped their breath in awe; there, in that pure and holy light, they adored the baby upon the straw.

FIRST READER: A spotted pig stole out of the mist, slipped past the ox and the ass unseen and into the stable. The barnyard hissed, “Go back to your mud hole! You’re unclean!”

SECOND READER: He hoisted his rough, bewhiskered chin up on to the trough where the infant lay (no easy thing for a fat boar’s kin) and saw the Christ child on the hay.

FIRST READER: He gazed at the baby wonderingly; no creature whinnied or scoffed the while. “Ox!” said the ass, “Did I rightly see?” “Ass,” said the ox, “Did the baby smile?”

—Note from the poem’s author: This poem has an interesting genesis. I carve hardwood crèches, with wise men, shepherd, and appropriate animals. One year I carved a pig. Then I realized I had a theological problem. Would there be a pig at a Jewish manger? But I liked my pig and I explained him this way: As the wise men are often seen as representatives of the gentile nations coming to the light, the pig represents the unclean animals of the world coming to Jesus for cleansing.

A Liturgy for Christmas Day

Processional Hymn

"Joy to the World"

Text: Isaac Watts, 1719

Music: Attr. George Frederick Handel, 1741;

arr. Lowell Mason, 1848

Tune: ANTIOCH, Meter: CM w. repeat

Chalice Hymnal #143

Reading from the Prophets

Isaiah 52:7-10

Meditation

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

—Kyle Childress

Hymn

"Good Christian Friends, Rejoice"

Text: Latin, 14th cent.

Tr. John Mason Neale, 1853, alt.

Music: Germany melody, 14th cent.

Harm. David Hugh Jones, 1953

Tune: IN DULCI JUBILO Meter: Irr.

Chalice Hymnal #164

Reading from the Psalms

Psalms 98

Meditation

Christmas is no less a cataclysmic event than Easter and resurrection. The world order is altered and will never be the same. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us... full of grace and truth." Christmas is not just for the kids. Here is the essence of Christianity; grace is a

person, it is the gift of Godself to us in a person. The truth is greater than that which can be explained. The truth of God must be received by faith.

—Raymond Bailey

Reading from the Epistles

Hebrews 1:1-4

Hymn

"Angels We Have Heard on High"

Text: Traditional French carol;

tr. Crown of Jesus, 1862, alt.

Music: French carol melody;

arr. Edward Shippen Barnes, 1937

harm. Austin C. Lovelace, 1964, alt.;

desc. Richard E. Gerig, 1956

Tune: GLORIA, Meter: 77.77 w. refrain

Chalice Hymnal #155

Gospel Reading

John 1:1-14

The Mystery of Grace: A Personal Confession

I have always loved Christmas. There is little about it that I do not love. My family knows this. But perhaps they have only partially understood the deepest roots of that love or why Vaughan-Williams's "The Blessed Son of God" or Bach's "Break Forth O Beauteous Heavenly Light" can so easily move me to tears.

Christmas is the Feast of the Incarnation. It is a sacrament to me because it is the symbol of the *ultimate* sacrament, and true symbols partake of and are transparent to the reality of which they are symbols. Christmas speaks of the living God who, in all the deep mystery of his love, has come to be with us, to dwell among us so that we need never be alone.

All the great symbols of Christmas say this to me: light in darkness, the sublime in the lowly, joy in sadness, fullness in emptiness, boisterous laughter and celebration in the midst of rapt silence, peace in the midst of turmoil and pain. Perhaps the holiest words in Scripture for me are the words that we read on Christmas Eve as we light the Christ candle: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory."

—C. W. Christian, from "Credo."



Peaceable Kingdom

The oxen fell upon their knees
The hour that He was born—
The ancients told us so—
And through the earth that favored hour
The sword hung idle in its sheath—
Or so it has been said.
No blood was shed,
No cry of pain to mute the angel's song,
And grieving hearts had peace,
If only for an hour.
And on the plain
The hungry lion lifted up his paw
And let the coney go, nor thought
To wonder why.

—C. W. Christian

A Liturgy for Epiphany

Reading from the Prophets

Isaiah 60:1-6

Meditation

Watch your step. You are approaching a dangerous manger. It also serves as a makeshift baby bed. Beware, for the one you seek did not stay a baby. Jesus, nursed and cuddled by Mary, later claimed everyone who does God's will as his mother. Jesus, worshipped by shepherds, later challenged us to seek out not lost sheep, but lost people. Jesus, given gifts by wise ones who had traveled from afar, called us to go out of our way to care for the hungry, the lonely, and the homeless. Watch your step as you take this Bethlehem baby into your arms and whisper to him. You may find him taking you into his arms, whispering new life into you.

—George White

Hymn

"Long Ago, Prophets Knew"

Text: Fred Prat Green, 1970

Music: Piaa Cantiones, 1582;

arr. Gustav Holst, 1925

Tune: PERSONENT HODIE, Meter: 6.6.6.6.6.Ref.

The Worshiping Church #142

Reading from the Psalms

Psalms 72:1-7, 10-14

Meditation

Holy One of heaven, mark these dark nights with the brilliance of your star to guide emissaries of exclaiming grace: of contradiction and scandal to the insolent innkeepers of this age; of blessing and bounty to the indigent, to all who find no lasting home save in the age to come.

—from "Advent Longing"

by Ken Sehested

Reading from the Epistles

Ephesians 3:1-12

Hymn

"Brightest and Best of the Stars"

Text: Reginald Heber, 1811

Music: James P. Hardin, 1892,

adapt. *The Church Hymnal*, 1894

Tune: MORNING STAR, Meter: 11.10.11.10.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 2:1-12

Benediction

God, we are your creative works in process. You alone know what we shall become. We do not know what you have in store in the fullness of our time. In the beginning, you created Light. In Mary, you became flesh. What will you become in us? Is there room in us for your seed to take root and grow? You have visited us with grace and favor. Help us now to take your Light to the world.

—Adapted from Thomas Hoffman's

A Child in Winter



art by Sally Lynn Askins

Magi

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

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

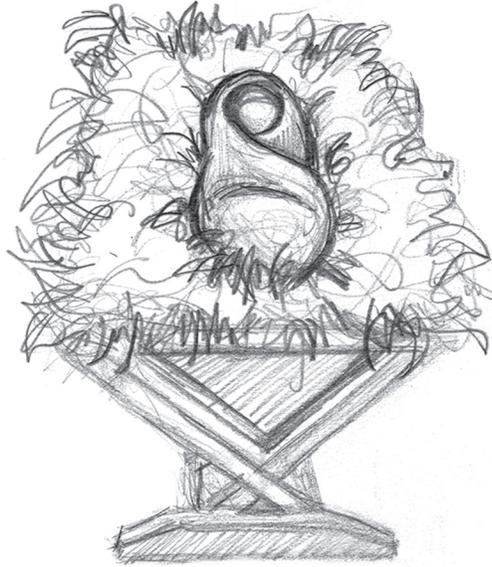
What did they remember?
Did they know the sacrament of God
Lay naked there before them?
Did they sense the mystery deep hidden in a child?
Did they burn with joy thereafter?
Or did they wonder why?

—C. W. Christian



art by Sally Lynn Askins

Benediction



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 the death of death,
that the sweet fragrance of holiness
was mingled with the earthliness 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