



Gathering the Outcasts

Worship Resources for the Creative Church - Advent/Christmastide 2018

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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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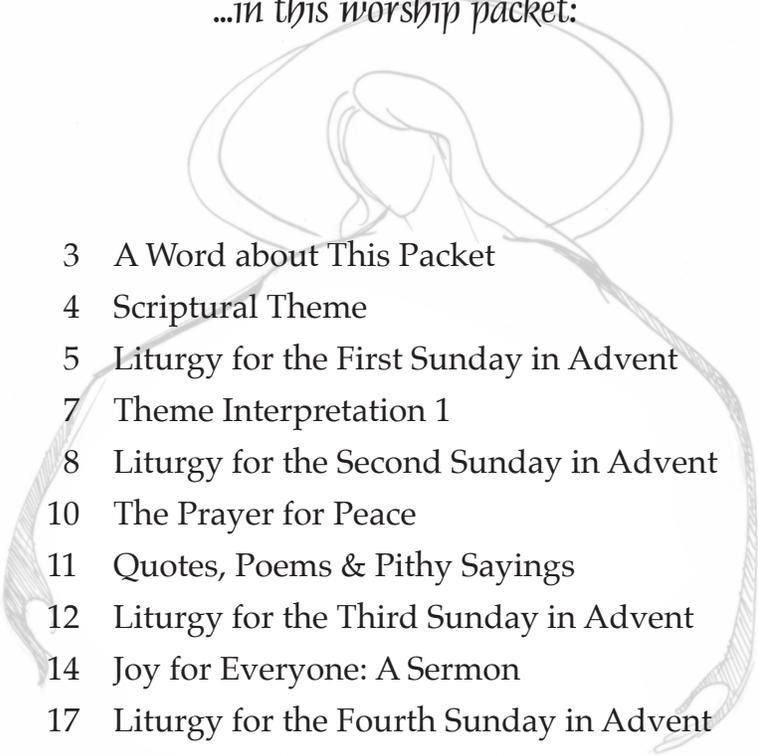
Leslie Withers

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

Gathering the Outcasts

...in this worship packet:

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Art by Sally Lynn Askins

the strong belief that biblical mandates to feed the poor were not intended to be optional. Since 1991, 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; 254/755-7745; seedseditor1@gmail.com; www.seedspublishers.org. Copyright © 2018.

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A Word about This Packet

As always, we at Seeds are indebted to a number of people for their contributions to this packet. During a brainstorming session, our liturgical team (composed of myself, Guilherme Almeida and Erin Conaway) was examining the liturgical readings for this Advent, and we came across the Zephaniah passage for the third Sunday. We were immediately struck by the clause in verse 19 of chapter 3: “I will save the lame and gather the outcast.”

The whole story of Advent is about outcasts. Here is a baby born to an unwed teenaged mother, to oppressed peasants. The story is first told to shepherds, the rednecks of biblical times, and to the magi, who were Gentiles and foreigners. Then we have the slaughter of the babies by Herod, prompting the young parents to become refugees.

Also, we remembered the words that Seeds intern Grayson Wolf wrote for the 2015 Hunger Emphasis packet, “Welcoming the Stranger”:

Sometimes society disdains the stranger: the poor, the hungry, the soldier, the imprisoned, the scoundrel, the stripper, the transgender person, the Christian, the drunkard, the Muslim, the policeman, the addict, the judge, the sinner. All are strangers, and God has a plan for all.

So, we realized, we are all strangers and outcasts. We have tried to pull together liturgies, prayers and sermons that will help us all to remember this, and to join God in the holy act of gathering the outcasts—which includes ourselves.

Guilherme Almeida did most of the work on the seven liturgies in this packet, including a special dramatized call to worship for each one. The calls to worship are inspired by the Las Posadas tradition of Hispanic culture.

The readers represent Mary and Joseph. In the Sundays in Advent, they are trying to find a place to stay in overcrowded Bethlehem. On Christmas Day and Epiphany, the language is more exuberant and festive, but our intention is for the readers to continue to represent Mary and Joseph as a reminder of the difficulty they faced in finding a place to bring this joy into being.

Brett Younger, senior minister at Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, NY, once again allowed

us to print one of his sermons. Mark McClintock, pastor of Speedway Baptist Church in Indianapolis, IN, helped us with activities for children and youth. Keith Sanford, a psychology professor at Baylor University, allowed us to once again print one of his songs.

We pulled art from some of our earliest Advent packets—by René Boldt, Lenora Mathis, Erin Kennedy Mayer, Mike Massengale, Robert Askins and Sally Lynn Askins—because they seemed to enhance the theme. The cover art is by Sally Lynn.

We are, as always, deeply grateful for all of you who subscribe to *Sacred Seasons*, and who make use of these gifts in your worship and work. We want you to feel free to play around with these materials, and adapt them to your congregation’s needs and resources. We would love to hear about how you used them. The *Sacred Seasons* readers are some of the most creative people we know.

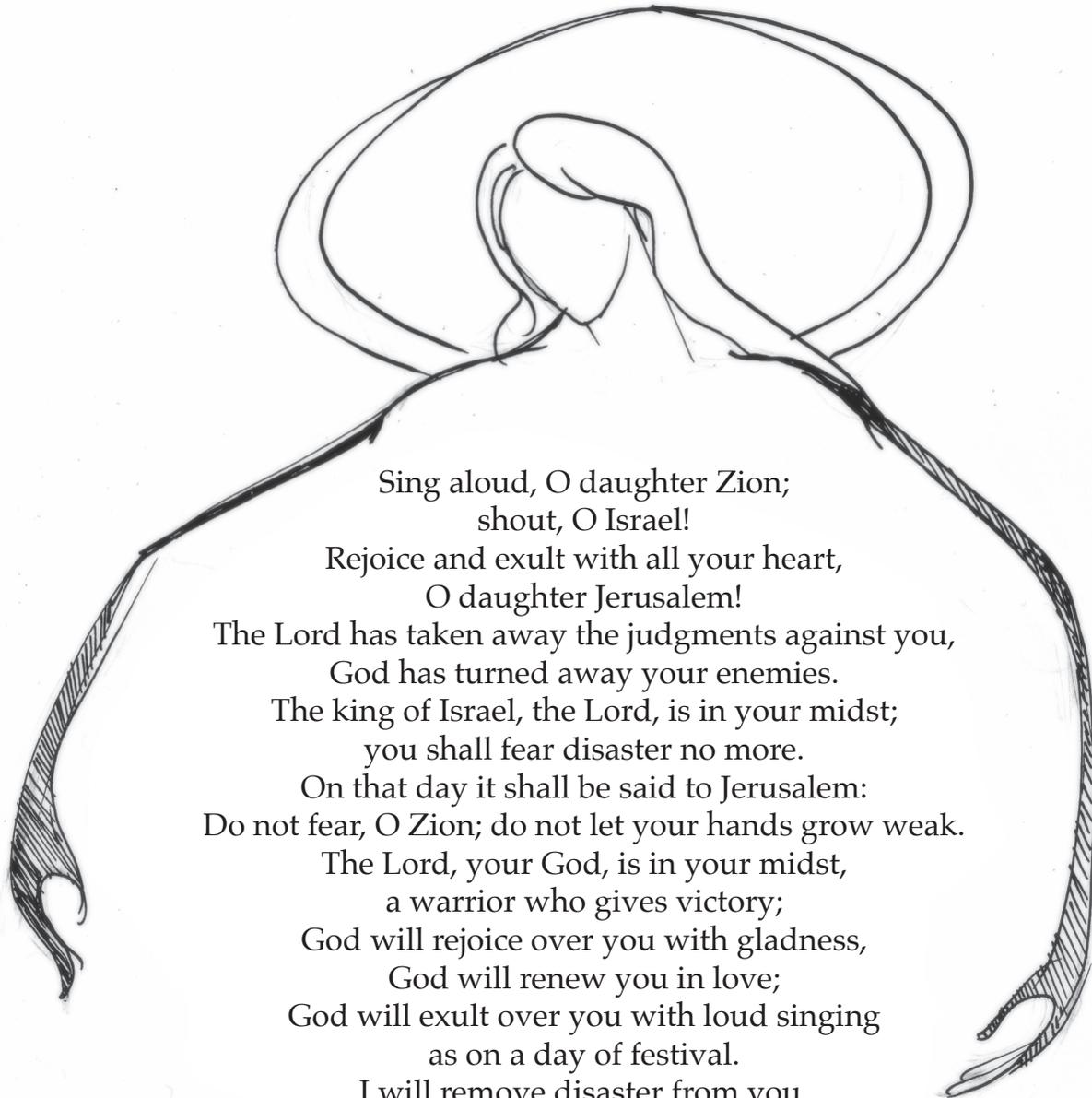
As always the contents of this packet are your congregation’s to use freely and we want you to share them with others. May we come ever closer to the true meaning of Advent and Christmastide.

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



Art by Br. John-Paul Markides, OSF. Used with permission.

Scriptural Theme



Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;
shout, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!
The Lord has taken away the judgments against you,
God 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;
God will rejoice over you with gladness,
God will renew you in love;
God 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.
Zephaniah 3:14-20

Art by Sally Lynn Askins

Gathering the Outcasts in Hope

A Liturgy for the First Sunday in Advent

by Guilherme Almeida

Processional Carol

“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

TUNE: VENI EMMANUEL,

Long Meter with Refrain

Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 79

Call to Worship

Editor’s note: The calls to worship in this year’s Advent services are inspired by the Las Posadas tradition of Hispanic culture. The readers represent Mary and Joseph, trying to find a place to stay in overcrowded Bethlehem. We recommend that they wear biblical costumes, but

we invite you to be creative in your interpretations as the Advent weeks unfold. (For more about Las Posadas, see page 6.)

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

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

READERS: We look dirty because the roads on which we travel have not been paved. We smell because our journey has been long, our walking has taken days and nights and we went without a chance to recharge. May we please have shelter? May we rest among you?

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

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

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

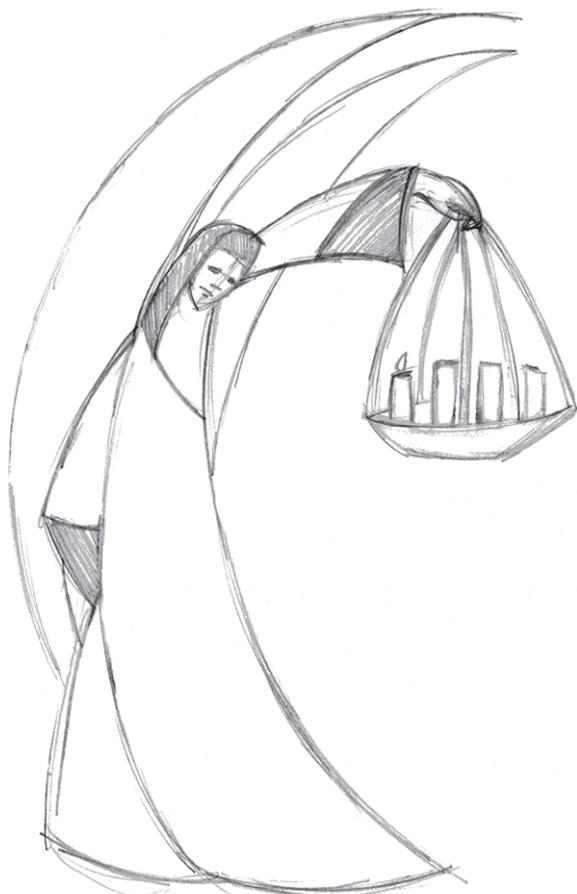
ALL: God of our Wandering Ancestors, protect all refugees in their travels. May they find a friend in each of us, and so make us worthy of the refuge we have found in you. Amen.

Lighting of the Hope Candle

Meditation of Preparation

Each year we light the candle of hope and do our best to put ourselves in the place of the magi, patiently studying the stars in hope that one night they might see the star of God’s coming; or in the place of Simeon or Anna who went to the temple every morning, hoping that they would be there when the Messiah came.

—Richard Groves



Art by Sally Lynn Askins

Hymn of Hope

“View the Present through the Promise”

WORDS: Thomas H. Troeger (b. 1945)

MUSIC: Roy Hopp (b. 1951)

TUNE: FRANKLIN PARK, 8.5.8.5.8.8.8.5

Sing! A New Creation No. 90

Reading from the Prophets

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Reading from the Psalms

Psalms 25:1-10

Hymn of Welcome

“O How Shall I Receive You”

WORDS: Paul Gerhardt, 1653;

tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1863,
and others; alt.

MUSIC: Melchior Teschner, 1615

TUNE: ST. THEODULPH, 7.6.7.6.D.

The New Century Hymnal No. 102

Epistle Reading

I Thessalonians 3:9-13

Gospel Reading

Luke 21:25-36

A Hymn for These Days

“God of Justice Ever Flowing”

WORDS: Kathleen R. Moore
(20th century)

MUSIC: *Columbian Harmony*
(1825)

TUNE: HOLY MANNA, 8.7.8.7.D.

Sing! A New Creation No. 101

Homily

Meditation of Commitment

When I take a tally of the people who surrounded Jesus in the days leading up to and following his birth, a great many of them seem to fit these descriptions: Mary the humble peasant girl, Joseph the patient carpenter, the coarse

shepherds—and those two elderly saints of the Temple community, Anna and Simeon. Because of their faithfulness, we anticipate the coming of true, complete joy and peace—light in the midst of darkness.

Advent is upon us, and it’s time for us to take on the roles of these pageant personalities. As people of the light, we have an obligation to shine. As sacred salt, we need to be useful to Christ.

—Mark McClintock, from “Salt, Light & Advent”

Carol of Hope

“Child in the Manger”

WORDS: Mary MacDonald (19th century);

tr. Lachlan MacBean, 1888

MUSIC: Traditional Gaelic melody;

harm. Mark Edwards, 2007

TUNE: BUNESSAN, 5.5.5.3.D.

Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 112

Passing of the Peace

Benediction

Las Posadas

Las Posadas is a novenario, a nine-day religious observance, that traditionally occurs in Hispanic cultures leading up to Christmas Eve. *Las Posadas* means, literally, “the inns.” Begun in Franciscan missions in Mexico some 500 years ago, these celebrations take place on the nine days before Christmas Eve, which is known as Noche Buena or “Holy Night.”

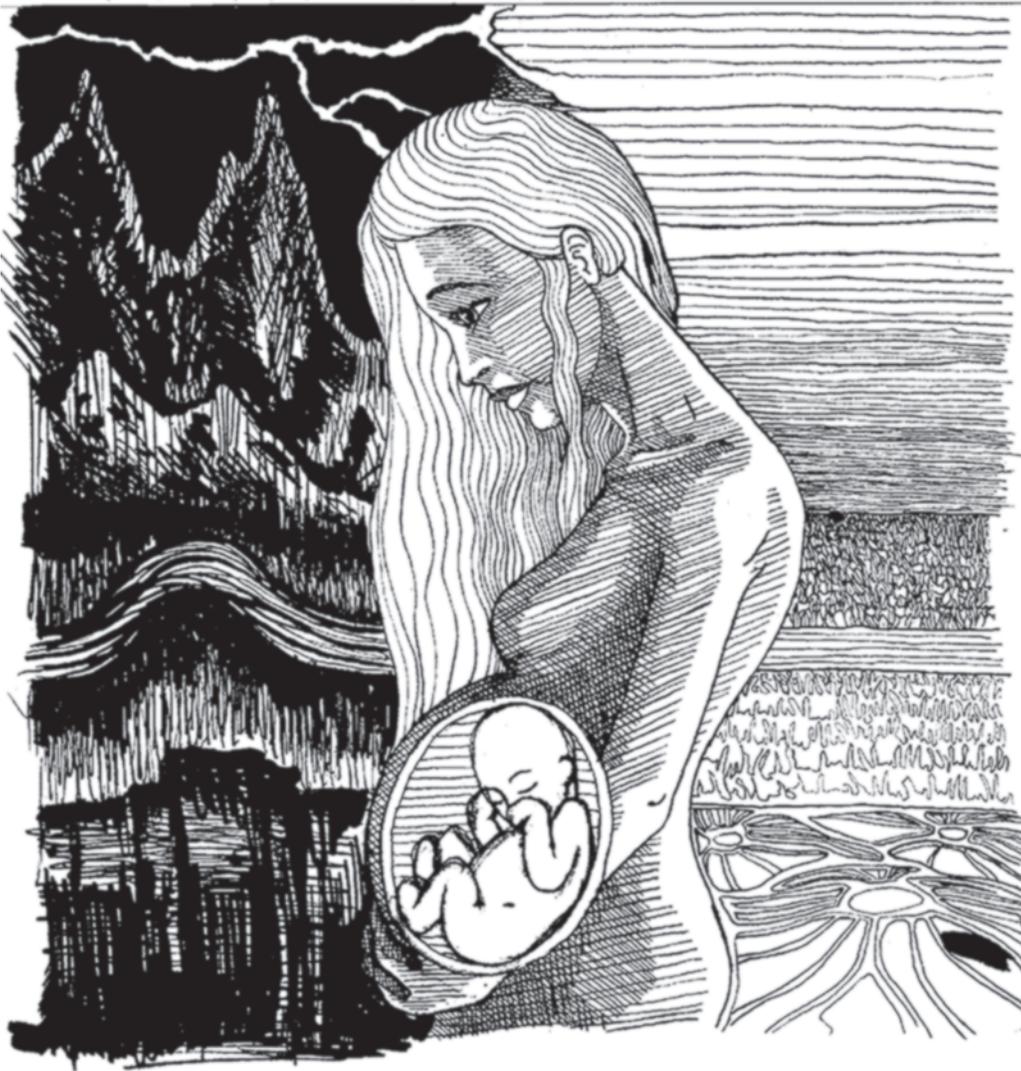
Each Posada is a dramatic re-enactment of the journey of Joseph and Mary—*Los Peregrinos* (the pilgrims) *San José y la Virgen María*—looking for lodging in Bethlehem. Starting on December 16, nine families will agree to host one evening’s Posada, finishing on Noche Buena. A number of other families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

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

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

Theme Interpretation I

Art by Robert Askins



Somewhere in the darkness of our wisdom,
love labored once again
to show its cause:
how to communicate to distant people
something of their value
to the Maker of them all;
searching for a gesture
that might say it all;
love reached deep inside itself—
and shaped a fragile child,
took it gently
to a quiet corner of the world
and trusted it to people
too young and poor to be spoiled....
—Daniel G. Bagby

Gathering the Outcasts in Peace

A Liturgy for the Second Sunday in Advent

by Guilherme Almeida

Processional Carol

“Comfort, Comfort O My People”

WORDS: Johannes Olearius, 1671;

tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1863; alt.

MUSIC: Trente Quatre Pseaumes, *Geneva*, 1551

TUNE: FREU DICH SEHR, 8.7.8.7.7.8.8.

The New Century Hymnal No. 101

Call to Worship

Editor’s note: The calls to worship in this year’s Advent services are inspired by the Las Posadas tradition of Hispanic culture. The readers represent Mary and Joseph, trying to find a place to stay in overcrowded Bethlehem. We recommend that they wear biblical costumes, but we invite you to be creative in your interpretations as the Advent weeks unfold. (For more about Las Posadas, see page 6.)

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

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

READERS: We look dirty because the roads on which we travel are hidden and darkened by shame. We smell because our energy is spent trying to quench our thirst and our hunger for meaning and there is very little time for self-care. May we please have shelter? May we rest among you?

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

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

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

ALL: God of our Suffering People, protect all who suffer from addictions and vices. May they find a

friend in each of us and so make us worthy of the refuge we have found in you. Amen.

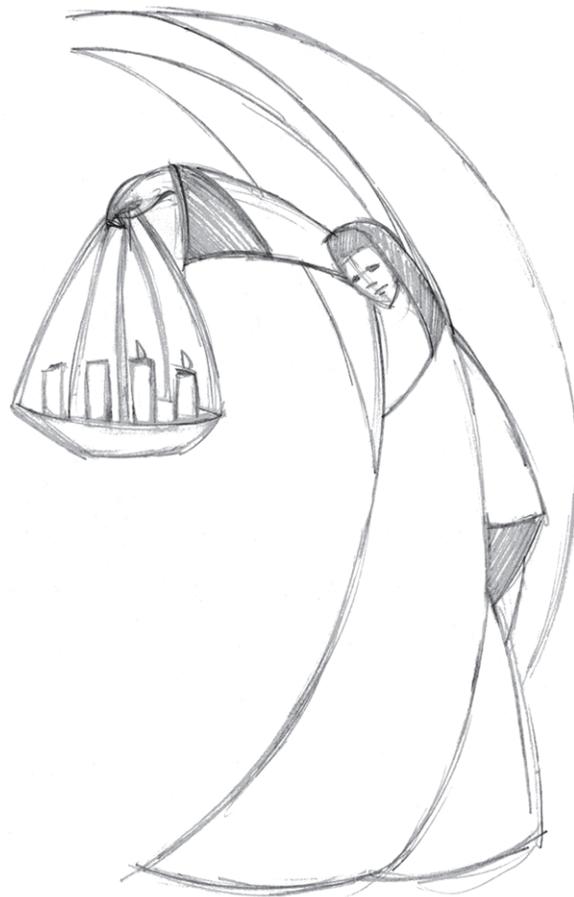
Lighting of the Peace Candle

Meditation of Preparation

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

Song of Peace

“Sent Out in Jesus’ Name” (*Enviado Soy de Dios*)
WORDS: Anonymous;



Art by Sally Lynn Askins

tr. Jorge Maldonado, alt.
MUSIC: Traditional Cuban; arr. Carmen Peña
TUNE: ENVIADO, 12.12.12.12.D.
The Faith We Sing No. 2184

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures
Baruch 5:1-9 or Malachi 3:1-4

A Hymn of Welcome
“Now the Heavens Start to Whisper”
WORDS: Mary Louise Bringle, 2005
MUSIC: Alexander Johnson’s *Tennessee Harmony*,
1818;
harm. *Lutheran Book of Worship*, 1978
TUNE: JEFFERSON, 8.7.8.7.D
Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 86

Epistle Reading
Philippians 1:3-11

First Gospel Reading
Luke 1:68-79

Hymn of Covenant
“Song of Zechariah/Blessed Be the God of Israel”
WORDS: Carl P. Daw, Jr. (b. 1944),
based on the Song of Zechariah, Luke 1:68-79
MUSIC: English folk tune;
adapt. and harm. Ralph Vaughan Williams
(1872-1958);
desc. Thomas Armstrong (1898-1994)
TUNE: FOREST GREEN, CMD
Sing! A New Creation No. 104

Second Gospel Reading
Luke 3:1-6

Homily

Meditation of Commitment
Christ, eternal Sun of justice, Christ,
the rose of wisdom’s seed,
Come to bless with fire and fragrance
hours of yearning, hurt, and need.
In the lonely, in the stranger,
in the outcast, hid from view:
Child who comes to grace the manger,
teach our hearts to welcome You.
—Mary Louise Bringle

Carol of Peace

“Like a Child”

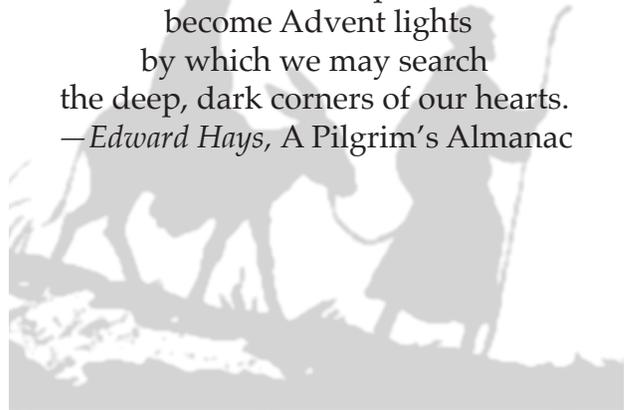
WORDS & MUSIC: Daniel Charles Damon, 1993;
arr. David Cherwien, 1999
TUNE: LIKE A CHILD, 6.6.6.3.D.
The Faith We Sing No. 2092

Passing of the Peace

Benediction

Sent out in Jesus’ name, our hands are ready now
to make the earth the place
in which the kingdom comes.
The angels cannot change a world of hurt and pain
into a world of love, of justice and of peace.
The task is ours to do, to set it really free.
O help us to obey and carry out your will.
—*Enviado Soy de Dios*, tr. Jorge Maldonado, 1988

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*



The Prayer for Peace

by Claire McKeever-Burgett

Holy God of earth and sky,
of light and dark,
of this time and last time,

We still pray for peace because
we still believe in miracles.

Miracles of body and bone,
marrow and music
bread and blood
hands and feet
breath and amen.

Miracles of childlike faith
and adult wonder
of light and love
of dancing and communion
of daring and diversity.

Miracles that light the night sky
even on the darkest of nights.

Miracles that stop a warrior's hand
even in the most brutal of circumstances.

Miracles that continue to lift the voices
of the weak, the meek, the mild, the least,
the last, the lonely, the lost.

Holy God of earth and sky
of light and dark
of this time and last time,

We still pray for peace because
we still believe in miracles.

Miracles like the one that brought you to us.

Miracles like the one that heard angels sing,
"Peace on earth and goodwill to all..."

Miracles like Mary giving birth to the Holy Child,
Jesus.

Yes, we still pray for peace because
we still believe in miracles.

Alleluia and Amen.

—Claire McKeever-Burgett is Program Interpretation Manager for Upper Room Ministries in Nashville, TN, and a frequent writer for the blog "pastorpoet.com." She is also a former Seeds of Hope intern. This prayer was inspired by the words of Ann Weems' poem, "I no longer pray for peace," and from an earlier prayer-poem written by Claire, entitled, "I Still Believe," found on www.pastorpoet.com. This was printed in a collection of Advent writings published by Glendale Baptist Church in Nashville, and is used with Claire's permission.

Art by Jesse Manning

Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings

Praise and honour to you, living God,
for John the Baptist,
and for all those voices crying in the wilderness
who prepare your way.
May we listen when a prophet speaks your word,
and obey.

—From the Advent liturgy in the New Zealand
Prayer Book

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.

—Edward Hays, A Pilgrim's Almanac

May the forgiving spirit of Him
to whom we dedicate this season
prevail again on earth.
May hunger disappear and terrorists
cease their senseless acts.
May people live in freedom,
worshiping as they see fit, loving others.
May the sanctity of the home be ever preserved.
May peace, everlasting peace, reign supreme.
—From Soundings

During Advent, opportunities for works of charity
abound, calling out for Christians from every side:
a sack of food for a needy family, money dropped
in a Salvation Army kettle, a donation to an Indian
school, a toy for 'Toys-for-Tots,' etc. Unfortunately,
these works of charity so easily can assuage the
Christian conscience, while doing nothing to bring
about a solution to the root causes of the problem.

Works of justice, on the other hand, follow
the road less traveled of Advent's hope to pursue
solutions for difficult problems. Hope comes through
works of justice rather than simply performing
works of charity.

Fr. Brian Cavanaugh, TOR, Gift of Wonder

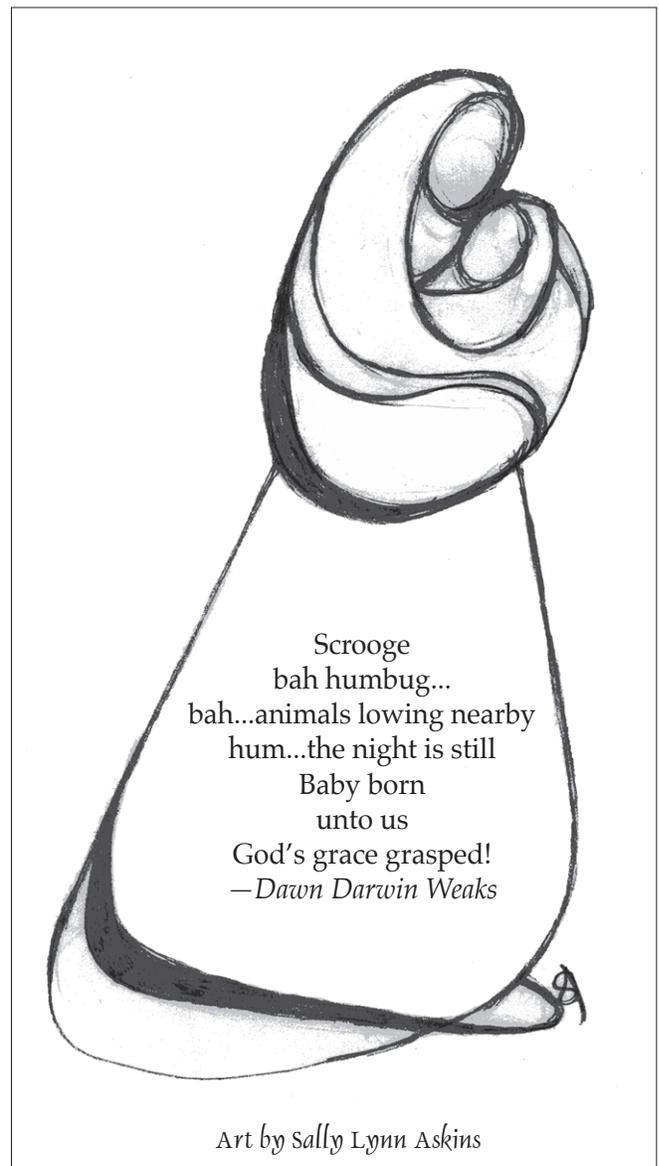
View the present through the promise,
Trust despite the deepening darkness,

Lift the world above its grieving
through your watching
and believing in the hope
past hope's conceiving:
Christ will come again.

—Thomas H. Troeger

Born in the night, Mary's Child,
a long way from your home;
Coming in need, Mary's Child,
born in a borrowed room.

—Geoffrey Ainger



Gathering the Outcasts in Joy

A Liturgy for the Third Sunday in Advent

by Guilherme Almeida

Processional Carol

"The King of Glory Comes"

WORDS: Willard F. Jabusch, 1965

MUSIC: Israeli melody; arr. John Ferguson, 1973

TUNE: PROMISED ONE, 12.12. with Refrain

Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 177

Call to Worship

Editor's note: The calls to worship in this year's Advent services are inspired by the Las Posadas tradition of Hispanic culture. The readers represent Mary and Joseph, trying to find a place to stay in overcrowded Bethlehem. We recommend that they wear biblical costumes, but we invite you to be creative in your interpretations as the

Advent weeks unfold. (For more about Las Posadas, see page 6.)

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

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

READERS: We look dirty because our places of comfort have been abused and mistreated. We smell because our resources are few. May we please have shelter? May we rest among you?

We look dirty because our workplace is corrupt and biased. We smell because we keep company with the violent and filthy. May we please have shelter? May we rest among you?

We look dirty because our self-esteem has been marred by unrealistic expectations. We smell because our sweat and blood have been sold and used for destruction. May we please have shelter? May we rest among you?

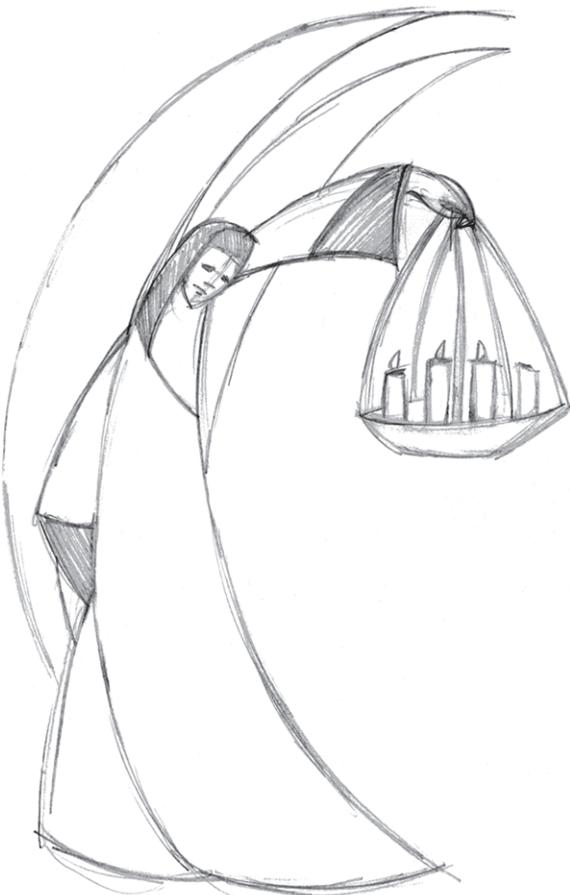
CONGREGATION: *We care not for your reasons. Every room is taken. Can't you see the place is full? You are bad for business.*

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

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

ALL: God of our Crying People, we hunger and thirst for justice. Protect all who find themselves in the trenches of violence and abuse. Give us wisdom, love and kindness. May they find a friend in each of us. In this way, make us worthy of the refuge we have found in you. Amen.

Lighting of the Joy Candle



Art by Sally Lynn Askins

Meditation of Preparation

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

—Brett Younger

Song of Joy

“With Joy Draw Water”

WORDS: Anne McKinstry, 1986, 1993

MUSIC: Irish traditional melody,
harm. Charles V. Stanford, 1906

TUNE: ST. COLUMBIA, 8.6.8.6. alt.

The New Century Hymnal No. 109

First Reading from the Prophets

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Second Reading from the Prophets

Isaiah 12:2-6

A Hymn for These Days

“Joy in the Morning”

WORDS and MUSIC: Natalie Sleeth, 1977

TUNE: JOY IN THE MORNING, *Irregular Meter*

The Faith We Sing No. 2284

Epistle Reading

Philippians 4:4-7

Gospel Reading

Luke 3:7-18

Hymn of Celebration

“Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn”

WORDS and MUSIC: Marty Haugen, 1983

TUNE: REJOICE, REJOICE, 9.8.9.8.8.7.8.9.

The New Century Hymnal No. 107

Homily

See Brett Younger's sermon, “Joy for Everyone,” on page 17.

Meditation of Commitment

With joy draw water from the spring;
salvation's living well.

The Holy One is in your midst;
glad praises sing and tell!

With love the poor will be received;
the proud will turn aside;

And faithfulness will be a path,
and righteousness the guide!

—Anne McKinstry

Carol of Joy

“Soon and Very Soon”

WORDS and MUSIC: Andraé Crouch (1947–2015)

TUNE: SOON AND VERY SOON, *Irregular Meter*
Sing! A New Creation No. 106

Passing of the Peace

Benediction



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

Joy for Everyone

A Sermon by Brett Younger

Text: Zephaniah 3:14-20

Several middle-aged men sit in folding chairs in a circle. The caption beneath the cartoon reads, “Guys without gift ideas support group.”

The leader of the group asks, “Leo, how do you feel about Wallace not finding anything for his wife except a toaster?”

Leo says: “It makes me feel better. My treadmill idea beats that by a mile.”

Sometimes a Christmas support group sounds like a good idea.

Christmas is not a party for those who smile the most. Christmas is for those who have experienced tragedy and discovered that sadness is not the last word.

When the Puritan Oliver Cromwell ruled England he outlawed Christmas. He was not the last religious person to think this holiday has gotten out of hand.

Did you know December 25th was not chosen because it was on Jesus’ birth certificate, but because that was the date of the biggest party of the year in Rome, and Christians wanted a celebration of their own? Some Christians think it is time to give Christmas back to the Romans.

We do not need to see the tree at Rockefeller Center again.

We do not think peppermint mocha is a real flavor. We do not care if the cashiers say “Merry Christmas” or “Happy Holidays” as they return our credit card.

Buying gifts at all seems unnecessary. Most of us are well-fed, well-clothed, and well-housed. When someone asks, “What do you need?” the answer is “We don’t need anything.” If we really needed something, we would buy it. That is why we exchange presents that no one needs—bacon-scented air freshener, an inflatable unicorn horn for your cat, or a Gertrude Stein stein.

On Christmas Day, the phrase most used in many homes is not “Merry Christmas,” but “I have the receipt if you want to send that back.”

Ebenezer Scrooge grumbled, “If I could work my will, every idiot who goes about with ‘Merry Christmas’ on his lips should be boiled in his own pudding and buried with a stake of holly through his heart.” We have moments when Scrooge is not that hard to understand.

Sometimes our weariness is the result of frustrations that will pass before the tree is taken down, but we also have good reasons to be sad.

For someone whose life is hard, Christmas can make it harder. For those who are facing Christmas for the first time—or the tenth time—since a loved one has died, almost everything reminds them of the one whose stocking is no longer hanging on the mantle.



Art by Erin Kennedy Mayer

Our sorrows—the ways in which our lives are not what we wish, the difficulties of being single, a tension-filled marriage, troubled children, aging parents, jobs that feel like dead-ends, and our many shortcomings—are magnified at Christmas.

Six hundred years before the first Christmas, Judah was in terrible shape. Assyria, the latest in a long line of super powers, was threatening again. One hundred years earlier, the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom of Israel and took the Israelites into captivity. Judah paid taxes to Assyria to keep its army from invading the southern kingdom.

Zephaniah almost seems to enjoy pointing out how terrible things are. The prophet criticizes Judah's shallowness, hypocrisy and arrogance. He pictures God traveling the streets of Jerusalem with a lantern to find bad people and punish them (1:12). Zephaniah sounds like Stephen King when he writes, "The people will soon walk like the blind. Their blood will be poured out like the dust."

The first two and a half chapters prophesy a judgment of such dimensions that even nature is destroyed: "in the fire of my passion all the earth shall be consumed" (3:8).

There is not much to sing about, and yet the prophet finds hope. He ends his gloomy diatribe 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, the journey home that we share."

The prophet pictures God breaking into song. Can we even imagine God singing? The prophet invites us to celebrate even when things are at their worst. It is often in the hard times that God's people recognize that God is with us.

Think of Mary rushing to Elizabeth's house. Mary, about whom there are so many misconceptions—pun intended—is a pregnant, unmarried teenager. She is worried about being a mother and worried about what her mother thinks.

Imagine Mary and Joseph approaching the hotel clerk who tells them, "There's no room in the inn."

Joseph pleads, "But she's pregnant."

The innkeeper says, "That's not my fault."

To which Joseph replies, "It's not my fault either."

Mary will soon be a homeless parent. A wicked king will try to murder her child. Yet Mary sings: "My soul magnifies the Most High. My spirit rejoices in God. God remembers us with love and mercy."

God's people rejoice even where there seems to be little reason. God's presence matters more than circumstances.

Christmas is not a party for those who smile the most. Christmas is for those who have experienced tragedy and discovered that sadness is not the last word.

Wendell Berry writes, "Be joyful, even though you've considered all the facts." The joy of Christmas is a defiant "nonetheless" that does not deny sorrow but overcomes it.

*Zephaniah says, "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."*

In *Never Too Late to Be Loved*, Browne Barr tells about the last year of his marriage. As his wife's terminal illness progresses, the Barrs have to deal with their feelings about death and faith and each other. As a result, their time together is gracious and joyful. Near the end of her life, Elizabeth talks about the prayers that sustain her.

She smiles and tells her husband, a Congregational minister,

There's too much Baptist left in me, because I've been talking to Jesus a lot lately. I know that Jesus isn't sitting on the deck beside that pink petunia. But it's easier if I think about him and see him and hear him when I talk with God. That's lots better than trying to have a conversation with the wind in the trees. Jesus has ears. And you know Jesus speaks English.

When Browne asks her what she prays about, she says:

Mostly the children. I know they're all grown up, but there's not a day that I don't worry or wonder about one of them. It's amazing, how in a week or so it all seems to work out that they all get equal time. Except they get cheated on the days when I'm most worried about you or upset

about some stupid thing the [government] is doing. Jesus and I have lots to talk about.

When he asks what she thinks about dying, she does not answer at once. "It's sort of strange," she says at last quietly, but her voice isn't somber, it's light and loving: "I really don't. Somehow whenever I think about death, God's just there. I feel God all around me. God's just there. The Everlasting Arms, I guess. So close."

*When we realize that life is hard,
and will not be everything we have
hoped, our joy either fades away
or goes deeper.*

Real joy has little to do with circumstances and everything to do with God's presence. It takes most of us a while to figure that out.

When I was a six-year-old in Sunday school, one of my favorite songs was "I've Got the Joy." I do not know who wrote the words, but it sounds like it could have been penned by Elizabeth Barrett Browning:

*I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart.
Where? Down in my heart. Where? Down in
my heart. I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in
my heart. Down in my heart to stay.*

The first stanza alone is enough to qualify the song as a classic, but the best part is the last verse:

*And if the devil doesn't like it he can sit on a tack.
Ouch! Sit on a tack. Ouch! Sit on a tack. Ouch!
And if the devil doesn't like it he can sit on a
tack. Sit on a tack to stay.*

The last stanza was wonderful not only for the lucidity of the poetry and the insightfulness of the theology, but also for its participatory nature. We began the song seated. Then when we shouted "Ouch!" we jumped out of our chairs.

When it was over, all the six-year-olds rolled on the floor and laughed uproariously at how accurately we had depicted what it would look like if the personification of evil did indeed sit on a tack.

When I was eleven years old, Three Dog Night recorded a song entitled *Joy to the World*. The first line was not "Joy to the World, the Lord is come" but was instead—and those of you who have as little musical taste as I have will remember this—"Jeremiah was a bullfrog, was a good friend of mine. I never understood a single word he said, but

I helped him drink his wine."

The last line was equally memorable, "Joy to the fishies in the deep blue sea and joy to you and me."

I bought the 45 rpm record, put the little plastic disk in to make it fit our stereo and, for the first time, invited my mother into my room to listen to a new record: "Look, Mom, I bought *Joy to the World*. That's one of your favorite carols, isn't it?"

My mother was so pleased. She suggested, as I hoped she would, that we listen to it. Mom left during, "I never understood a single word he said," long before "Joy to the fishies in the deep blue sea." I rolled on the floor and laughed uproariously.

Now when I sing of joy it is in a different key. I no longer find much joy in taunting either the devil or my mother—though both of those activities may have their place. Joy is now less like uproarious laughter and more like sustaining hope.

Some things are not as simple as they once were. I realize now that not all of my dreams will come true. I have seen some people I care for hurt terribly. I have a few scars of my own.

Some of the people I have loved have died. When we realize that life is hard, and will not be everything we have hoped, our joy either fades away or goes deeper.

Most recent hymnals include *Joy to the World*—the Isaac Watts version, not the Three Dog Night version—but, like our hymnal, they omit the third stanza: "No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground; He comes to make his blessings flow, far as the curse is found."

The editors think congregations do not enjoy singing: "Far as the curse is found." But it may be that Isaac Watts understood that real joy is found on the other side of the sorrows that grow and the thorns that destroy. Real joy has little to do with circumstances and everything to do with God's presence. God is the great joy deep inside us—the joy, joy, joy, joy down in our hearts.

So wrap the packages. Turn on the Christmas lights. Trim the tree. Enjoy the calories. Laugh out loud. Dance. Celebrate. And be surprised by God's joy. God is with us, so sing joyfully and triumphantly. And if the devil does not like it, he can sit on a tack.

—Brett Younger is senior minister of the historic Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, NY, and a frequent and longtime *Seeds of Hope* contributor. If you're planning to be in Brooklyn Heights, contact Brett at byounger@plymouthchurch.org and ask to schedule a tour of church, including the basement area that served as a stop on the Underground Railroad.

Gathering the Outcasts in Love

A Liturgy for the Fourth Sunday in Advent

by Guilherme Almeida

Processional Carol

"Toda la Tierra / All Earth Is Waiting"

WORDS: Tirso Vaquero;

tr. Gertrude C. Suppe (b. 1911)

MUSIC: Alberto Taulé, (b. 1932)

TUNE: TAULÉ, 11.11.12.12.

Sing! A New Creation No. 93

Call to Worship

Editor's note: The calls to worship in this year's Advent services are inspired by the Las Posadas tradition of Hispanic culture. The readers represent Mary and Joseph, trying to find a place to stay in overcrowded Bethlehem. We recommend that they wear biblical costumes, but we invite you to be creative in your interpretations as the Advent weeks unfold. (For more about Las Posadas, see page 6.)

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

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

READERS: We look dirty because your vision of us is prejudiced and judgmental. We smell because of the untreated wounds caused by the stones thrown at us. May we please have shelter? May we rest among you?

We look dirty and smell because we don't belong to your tribe. We look dirty and smell because we don't live life like you live. May we please have shelter? May we rest among you?

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

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

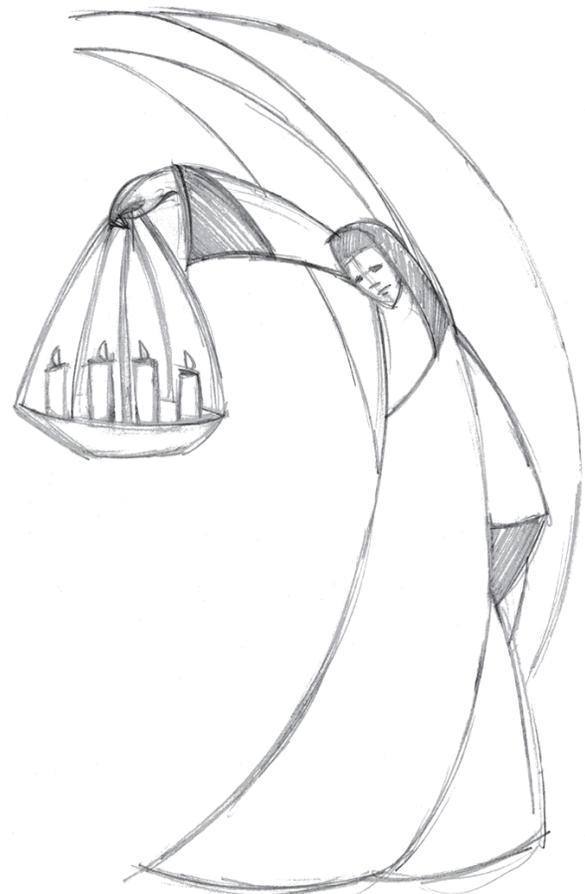
CONGREGATION: *Oh, my goodness, do come in. You can use the manger. For the rooms that we do have are for a rich traveler.*

ALL: God of All of Us, Protect all who experience discrimination and abuse because of who they are. Give them grace to forgive and give them strength to teach the oppressor. May they find a friend in each of us and so make us worthy of the refuge we have found in you. Amen.

Lighting of the Love Candle

Meditation of Preparation

God of all hope and joy,
open our hearts in welcome,
that your Son Jesus Christ at his coming
may find in us a dwelling prepared for himself....
—From the Advent liturgy in the New Zealand Prayer Book



Art by Sally Lynn Askins

Hymn of Love

"A Mother Lined a Basket"

WORDS: Mary Nelson Keithahn, 1998

MUSIC: John D. Horman, 1998

TUNE: WEST MAIN, 7.6.7.6.D.

The Faith We Sing No. 2189

Reading from the Prophets

Micah 5:2-5a

Reading from the Psalms

Psalms 80:1-7

A Hymn for These Days

"Tell Out, My Soul"

WORDS: Timothy Dudley-Smith, 1961

MUSIC: Henry W. Greatorex, 1919, alt.

TUNE: WOODLANDS, 10.10.10.10.

Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 94

Epistle Reading

Hebrews 10:5-10

Gospel Reading

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

Hymn of Proclamation

"Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne"

WORDS: Timothy R. Matthews

MUSIC: Emily E. S. Elliott

TUNE: MARGARET, *Irregular Meter*

The Faith We Sing No. 2100

Homily

Meditation of Commitment

Tell out, my soul, the greatness
of God's might!

Powers and dominions lay their glory by.

Proud hearts and stubborn wills
are put to flight,

The hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

— *Timothy Dudley-Smith*

Carol of Love

"O Loving Founder of the Stars"

WORDS: Latin hymn, anonymous

(9th century);

tr. *The New Century Hymnal*, 1993

MUSIC: Ancient Sarum plainsong, mode IV

TUNE: CONDITOR ALME, LM

The New Century Hymnal No. 111

Passing of the Peace

Benediction

God Who Loves Love

by Claire McKeever-Burgett

*This is how I will know you are my disciples:
that you truly love one another.*

John 13: 35

God who loves love

God who is love

God in the flesh

God in our flesh

We wait for

God who loves love.

We expect you.

We need you.

We wait for you.

We hope for

God who loves love

God who is love

God in the flesh

God in our flesh

We wait for

God.

— *Claire McKeever-Burgett is Program Interpretation Manager for Upper Room Ministries in Nashville, TN, and a frequent writer for the blog "pastorpoet.com." She is also a former Seeds of Hope intern. This prayer is taken from a collection of Advent writings published by Glendale Baptist Church in Nashville, and is used with Claire's permission.*



Art by Neil Davis

Teaching Children & Youth How to Gather the Outcasts

A Brainstorming Session

You will find a list of things that children can do (with help) on page 24 of this packet, but we also want to share some more ideas with those of you who teach children and youth in church settings. Most of these ideas come from Mark McClintock, pastor of Speedway Baptist Church in Indianapolis, IN. Mark spent a good portion of his career in children's ministry—both in churches and at the PASSPORTkids! camping program based in Birmingham, AL.

While coordinating PASSPORTkids! Mark created activities for elementary-school aged children, third grade and up, to build empathy. When activities like this are debriefed, it brings out some very fruitful discussion and amazing insights from the children. For this Advent packet, Mark has suggested a new activity (see "Treasure Hunt" on page 20).

Some of Mark's colleagues at PASSPORTchoices, a youth camp, instructed participants to each wear a burqa—a long, loose garment covering the whole body from head to feet, worn in public by many Muslim women—to a busy public place and sit silently for a time. Afterwards, they went back to their gathering place and discussed how that felt.

Mark's present church includes several language groups, and he sometimes asks those groups to teach the English-speaking children a song. Sometimes church members take youth and children along when they visit an apartment community for people who are HIV positive. "Any time you take kids to a place where people are isolated from kids, that can have a very powerful effect on the people in that community—and on the kids," Mark said.

Another important thing to remember, when discussing the 12 activities on page 21, is that these activities shouldn't always be about giving a handout. It should be about relationships, about one person touching another person's life.

Sometimes these new relationships can profoundly change a young person's attitude

toward people who are "other." One year, the Seventh & James Baptist youth (from the Waco, TX, church where the Seeds offices are housed) worked in a homeless shelter in San Antonio. Later, the group was visiting downtown and was warned by someone that a homeless man was sitting on a bench down the street and that they shouldn't go that way. One of the youth cried out, "But that's Freddy!"¹ They had served a meal to him and talked to him earlier in the week. He was no longer a frightening stranger. —lkc

Endnote

1. The name has been changed.



Art by Sally Lynn Askins

Treasure Hunt

An Activity for Children

by Mark McClintock

Ask who wants to find Treasure. Choose two volunteers to be the Treasure Hunters (it may be more fun if you choose highly competitive kids). Show the group an object (e.g., a bean bag, a Bible, a roll of tape—anything on hand that can be easily hidden) and proclaim it “the Treasure.” Explain that while the Treasure Hunters are out of the room, the rest of the group will hide the Treasure somewhere in the room. Then the Treasure Hunters will return and have two minutes to find the Treasure.

While the volunteers are out of the room, tell the remaining group that they must pretend the Treasure Hunters are now invisible. Their job is to sit and talk in groups of two or three AND TOTALLY IGNORE the Treasure Hunters, no matter what. Can they hold out? Meanwhile, hide the Treasure some place nearly impossible to find. Have the group

partner up while you go get the Treasure Hunters—or ask an assistant to instruct the Treasure Hunters while you are with the group.

In private, tell the Treasure Hunters that they may ask for help from any of the students (but not the leaders). They may not touch anyone, only speak to them.

Bring the Treasure Hunters into the room and tell them, “The other kids know exactly where the Treasure is, but you don’t. You have two minutes to find it—go!” Call out one-minute and 30-second warnings. When the time is up, debrief with the group:

- Explain to everyone the instructions you gave in secret and say, “This was an experiment to see what it’s like to be overlooked or ignored.”
- Treasure hunters, what did you first think when the others ignored you?
- How did you change your strategy?
- How did it feel as you got closer to the time limit?
- Treasure hiders, what did you think and feel when the Treasure hunters tried to ask for your help?
- Did your thoughts and feelings change at all as they got closer to the time limit? If so, what changed them?
- When have you felt ignored? What did you do about it?
- Who are some people in your world that others ignore? Why do you think they are ignored?
- How can we “see” and include people who are ignored?
- Pray that God will open our eyes to see those who are “outcasts” and guide us to welcome them.

—Mark McClintock is pastor of Speedway Baptist Church in Indianapolis, IN. He spent a number of years as a children’s minister and as coordinator of PASSPORTkids!, a summer camp for third-through-sixth-grade children. Over the years, he has generously shared with Seeds of Hope many activities for children, as well as sermons and other writings for grown-ups.



Gathering the Outcasts

Twelve Activities for Youth & Children

by Katie Cook & Mark McClintock

Note to a child or young person: Below are a few ideas that might help you learn how to be more welcoming to people who are new or different, or who are being left out by your community. Please make sure that you have talked with a parent or another adult before you do any of these activities, and ask one of them to help you or go with you when you do them.

1. Think of a person in your church or community who looks or acts in a way that seems strange to you. Differences sometimes push us away from people, but they can also draw us together. With a trusted adult, go meet that person and invite him or her to tell you about himself or herself. Who knows what interesting things you may discover!

2. Do you hear someone speaking a different language from yours? Perhaps you could ask him or her to teach you to say "hello" in his or her language.

3. When you go to an activity with lots of people, look for someone who is alone. Introduce yourself. Invite him or her to join in the activity with you.

4. Find out about someone in your church who is sick, and make a special Christmas card for him or her. Perhaps you could encourage your whole class to do this. Try to do it without buying any supplies. Use household items that you can find, but be sure and get permission.

5. You will probably need your youth minister or Sunday school teacher's help with this activity. Arrange for your youth group or class to meet one time during Advent with the Sunday school class in your church that has the oldest people. Make a Christmas stocking

for each of the older members. (If the number in their class is about the same as the number in your class, you could pair the youth with the older people. The young person paired with each older person could be responsible for that person's stocking.) Ask your leader to write five questions on note cards, like these:

"What is your favorite Christmas memory?"

"What is one thing you would like for other people to know about you?"

"How long have you been at this church?"

"What is your favorite thing about this church?"

"What is the best place you've ever visited?"

Then, when the Sunday morning comes (or another time, if that works better), put the youth and older people at tables or in small groups, with equal numbers from each class in each group. If you have paired each youth with an older person earlier, make sure they are sitting together. Both the older people and the youth should answer the questions. This can be magical.

6. Encourage a group to go to a nursing home and sing Christmas carols for the residents. If you have time, you could play simple card games with them. You could also go to the homes of homebound people and sing for them as well. Some churches rent vans or buses to take the carolers to these places and then meet at the church for hot soup or cocoa afterwards.

7. Find a family that is new in your church or neighborhood that seems to be lonely and having a hard time fitting in. Perhaps they are from another country. Perhaps they are refugees or asylum-



Art by Erin Kennedy Mayer

seekers. Make a welcome basket for them. Contents could include: a map of your community, a gift card for a nearby grocery store, some of your favorite snacks or a “comfort buddy” (stuffed animal or action figure) for each child.

Find out the ages and needs of the family members and ask each member of your family to purchase or make a gift for one of their family.

Another really helpful idea is to go on a “field trip” with the family to help them learn how to find what they want at a supermarket, how to open and use a bank account, where to catch a bus or to get a driver’s license—the things we take for granted. Ask what they would like to know more about. It’s important NOT to do everything FOR them, but to help them figure out how to do what they need for themselves.

8. Help stock the shelves at a neighborhood food pantry. Don’t just stay in the back! Go meet some of the clients and spend time getting to know them.

9. Make hand-made Christmas cards and gifts for a local HIV/AIDS organization or support group. Or you might send cards to immigrants in detention centers through the Lutheran Immigrant & Refugee Services.

10. Get a group together and host a party that

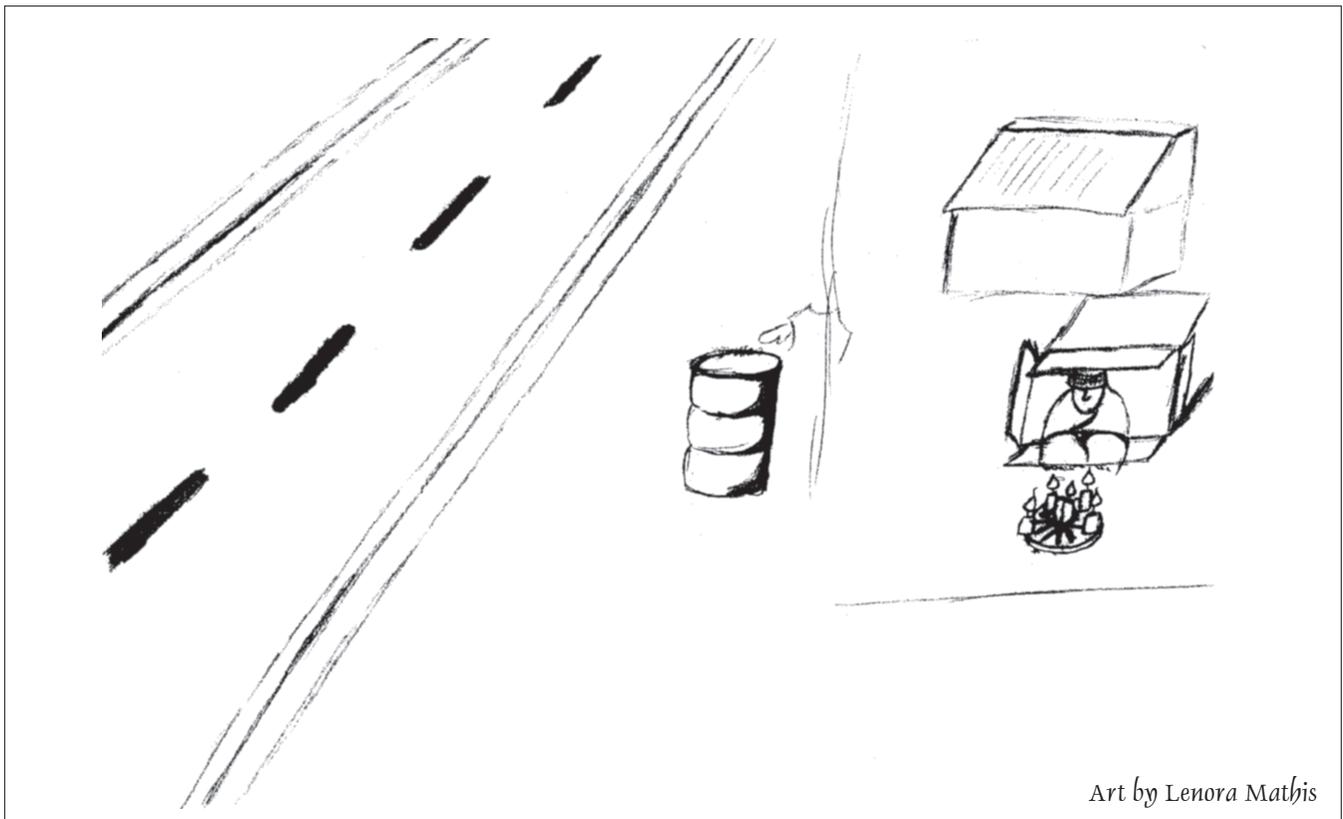
includes children from under-resourced families—maybe even in a homeless shelter or a Ronald McDonald house. Take supplies with you and help them make Christmas cards and gifts for their parents.

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

12. Ask your parents or church leaders about a group of people who are being treated like outsiders in your community. Find out how to write a letter to your mayor or city council member—or, if it is a statewide issue, write to your governor or state legislators. If you are in the youth group, do some research together and find out what policies and practices are causing them to struggle, and then write your letters.

—Mark McClintock is the pastor of Speedway Baptist Church in Indianapolis, IN. Katie Cook is the Seeds of Hope editor.

Note about Activity 4: Another possibility for this would be to use voice or video recorders or cell phones to record videos of some of the conversations and share a compilation of them to the congregation.



Art by Lenora Mathis

Gathering the Outcasts

A Liturgy for Christmas Eve

by Guilherme Almeida

Processional Carol

“O Come, All Ye Faithful”

WORDS: Latin Hymn; attr. to John Francis Wade, ca. 1743; tr. Frederick Oakeley, 1841, alt.

MUSIC: John Francis Wade, ca. 1743

TUNE: ADESTE FIDELES,

Irregular Meter with Refrain

Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 103

Call to Worship

Editor’s note: The calls to worship in this year’s Advent services are inspired by the Las Posadas tradition of Hispanic culture. The readers represent Mary and Joseph, trying to find a place to stay in overcrowded Bethlehem. We recommend that they wear biblical costumes, but we invite you to be creative in your interpretations as the Advent weeks unfold. (For more about Las Posadas, see page 6.)

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

CONGREGATION: *You look dirty and you smell. Will you please keep moving? For you rkind there is no place, for our inn is decent.*

READERS: We look dirty and smell because taking a bath is a privilege. May we please have shelter? May we rest among you? We look dirty because we worship a God you don’t know. We smell because our obeisance is misinterpreted as weakness. May we please have shelter? May we rest among you?

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

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

CONGREGATION: *Oh, my goodness, do come in. You can use the manger. For the rooms that we do have are for rich travelers.*

ALL: God of New Beginnings, Teach us hospitality

and teach us obedience. Give us a vision of your grandeur and richness; grant us your lavishing love when we cling to our labels and strata. May those who are outcast find a friend in each of us and so make us worthy of the refuge we have found in you. Amen.

Lighting of the Hope Candle

Meditation of Hope

There He is—a child, nothing more than a child. In vulnerability, in strength, in fragility, revealing power. There He is—a child, like all children of the world, dreaming of a future. This child is the Hope of the world.

—François Arnold, Pierre-Philippe Bayart, Robert Riber, Charles Singer, Fritz Westphal, from *The Ways of Advent*

A Carol of Hope

“Born in the Night, Mary’s Child”

WORDS and MUSIC: Geoffrey Ainger, 1964; harm. Richard D. Wetzel, 1972

TUNE: MARY’S CHILD, 7.6.7.6.

The New Century Hymnal No. 152



Art by Erin Kennedy Mayer

Reading from the Prophets
Isaiah 9:2-7

Lighting of the Peace Candle

Meditation of Peace

When Mary's baby was born it was said that the very heavens sang of peace on an earth that was, at that very moment, seething with a bitterness and an anger that threatened to explode into violence at any moment.

—Richard Groves

Carol of Peace

"Silent Night, Holy Night"

WORDS: Joseph Mohr, 1818;

tr. John Freeman Young (st. 1, 3), 1863;

tr. Anonymous (st. 2, 4)

MUSIC: Franz Grüber, 1818

TUNE: STILLE NACHT, *Irregular Meter*
Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 134

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 96

Lighting of the Joy Candle

Meditation of Joy

Like a child we will meet, ragged clothes, dirty feet, like a child on the street, Jesus comes.

Like a child we once knew coming back into view, like a child born anew, Jesus comes.

—Daniel Charles Damon, 1993

Carol of Joy

"Joy to the World! The Lord Is Come"

WORDS: Isaac Watts, 1719

MUSIC: George Frederick Handel; arr. Lowell Mason, 1836

TUNE: ANTIOCH, *CM with Repeat*
Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 102

Epistle Reading

Titus 2:11-14

Lighting of the Love Candle

Meditation of Love

God, enlarge my heart that it may be big enough to receive the greatness of your love. Stretch my

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

—Ghanaian prayer

Carol of Love

"Jesus, Jesus, Oh, What a Wonderful Child"

WORDS: Doc Bagby

MUSIC: Margaret Allison (b. 1920);

harm. Jeffrey Radford (b. 1953)

TUNE: WONDERFUL CHILD, *Irregular Meter*
Sing! A New Creation No. 108

Gospel Reading

Luke 2:1-14 (15-20)

Lighting of the Christ Candle

Litany to Welcome the Christ Child

ONE: Welcome Jesus, humble gentle Saviour,

MANY: *welcome to Bethlehem,*

ONE: where we have loved and fought

MANY: *and longed for the peace the world can never give.*

ONE: We ask for your peace, your love, your gentleness,

MANY: *and the courage to live that way.*

—From the Christmas liturgy in the New Zealand Prayer Book

Passing of the Peace

Benediction

May this Christmas be a time in which we can truly celebrate the Christ who is alive in each of us. And when dawn breaks tomorrow, may we express the vision that is Christmas. May we express Christmas by how we live and walk with God at our side. As the prophet said, it is an audacious time when the wolf shall lie down with the lamb and the fatling and the calf together, nation shall not raise up sword against nation and neither shall they learn war anymore. The only way for that to happen is if we truly share the Christmas hope with a frozen and bitter world in need of warmth and hope.

—Douglas M. Donley

Gathering the Outcasts

A Liturgy for Christmas Day

by Guilherme Almeida

Processional Carol

“Once in Royal David’s City”

WORDS: Cecil F. Alexander, 1848; alt.

MUSIC: Henry J. Gauntlett, 1849; harm. A. H. Mann, 1919

TUNE: IRBY, 8.7.8.7.7.7.

The New Century Hymnal No. 145

Call to Worship

Editor’s note: The calls to worship in this year’s Advent services are inspired by the Las Posadas tradition of Hispanic culture. The readers represent Mary and Joseph. In the Sundays in Advent, they are trying to find a place to stay in overcrowded Bethlehem. On Christmas Day and Epiphany, the language is more exuberant and festive, but our intention is for the readers to continue to represent Mary and Joseph as a reminder of the difficulty they faced in finding a place to bring this joy into being. As before, we recommend that they wear biblical costumes, but we invite you to be creative in your interpretations. (For more about Las Posadas, see page 6.)

READERS: We worship the God of humble beginnings.

CONGREGATION: *Down in a lowly manger the humble Christ was born,
And God sent us salvation that blessed Christmas morn.*

READERS: We worship the God of satisfying justice.

CONGREGATION: *The shepherds feared and trembled when lo! Above the earth rang out the angel chorus that hailed our Savior’s birth.*

ALL: **Go, tell it on the mountain,
Go, tell it over the hills,
Go, tell it where the tired are traveling,
Go, tell it where the voiceless are hiding,
That Jesus Christ is born.**

Lighting of the Advent Wreath

Meditation of Preparation

God has chosen the weak things to overcome the strong, foolish things to confound the wise, lowly

things to humble the haughty. That is God’s way, and it ought to be a reminder for us when we wish to know where to look for God or to know what God wants us to do in the world.

—Richard Groves

Song of Christmastide

“He Is Born”

WORDS and MUSIC: French Carol (18th century);
harm. David W. Music, 1999

TUNE: IL EST NÉ, 7.8.7.7. with Refrain
Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 106

Reading from the Prophets

Isaiah 52:7-10

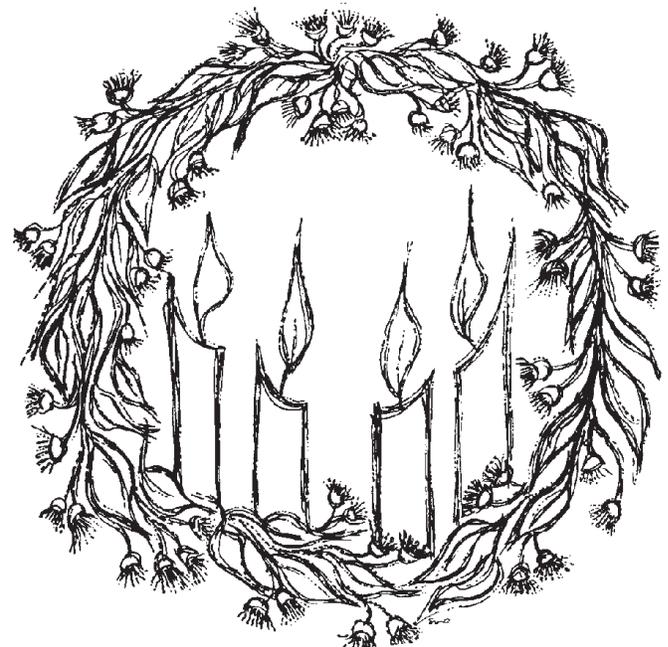
Reading from the Psalms

Psalms 98

Carol of Celebration

“Rise Up, Shepherd, and Follow”

WORDS and MUSIC: African American Spiritual



Art by Susan Daily, IBVM

TUNE: RISE UP, SHEPHERD,
Irregular with Refrain
The Faith We Sing No. 2096

Epistle Reading
Hebrews 1:1-4 (5-12)

Gospel Reading
John 1:1-14

A Carol for These Days
"Star-Child"

WORDS: Shirley Erena Murray, 1994
MUSIC: Carlton R. Young, 1994
TUNE: STAR CHILD, 4.5.4.5. with Refrain
The Faith We Sing No. 2095

Homily

Meditation of Commitment & Joy
Star-Child earth-Child go-between of God,

love Child, Christ Child, heaven's lightening rod.
Street child, beat child, no place left to go,
hurt child, used child, no one wants to know.
Grown child, old child, memory full of years,
sad child, lost child, story told in tears.
This year, let the day arrive
when Christmas comes for everyone, everyone
alive!
— Shirley Erena Murray

Carol of Joy
"Gloria/Glory"
WORDS & MUSIC: Pablo Sosa (b. 1947),
Argentina
TUNE: CUEQUITA, *Irregular Meter*
Sing! A New Creation No. 116

Passing of the Peace

Benediction

I Need a Savior

by Heather Herschap

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 San Antonio, TX.

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14

Hymn of Light

“Arise, Your Light Is Come”

WORDS: Ruth Duck, 1973

MUSIC: William Walter, 1872

TUNE: FESTAL SONG, SM

The New Century Hymnal No. 164

Epistle Reading

Ephesians 3:1-12

Gospel Reading

Matthew 2:1-12

A Hymn for These Days

“Hear the Voice of God, So Tender”

WORDS: Lavon Bayler, 1987; rev. 1993

MUSIC: Skinner Chávez-Melo, 1985

TUNE: RAQUEL, 8.7.8.7.D.

The New Century Hymnal No. 174

Homily

Meditation of Commitment

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.

—Ken Sehested from “Advent Longing”

Hymn of Purpose

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

WORDS: South African;

tr. Hal Hopson, 1994

MUSIC: Zulu melody;

adapt. Hal Hopson, 1994

TUNE: SIYAHAMBA, *Irregular Meter*
Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 155

Passing of the Peace

Benediction

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



Music for Epiphany

Rising Star

Keith Sanford

D min G min F B \flat C G min

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

D min G min D min E A

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

D min C B \flat G min A maj

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

D min C F G min

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

A min7 D min D min C

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

F C A min D min

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

—Keith Sanford is a professor of psychology at Baylor University in Waco, TX, and is a member of Seventh & James Baptist Church, where the Seeds offices are housed. He has been very generous in lending us his songs for Sacred Seasons packets.

Theme Interpretation 2



Not just a baby
born to make us feel good
once a year, he
came to change us
so completely that our neighbors
would have trouble
recognizing us:
a small collection
of people rich in compassion
and not easily distracted
by self-preoccupation;
a people so Christ-struck
as to wage peace everywhere
the whisper of war is blessed;
a clan so responsive to the face of Christ
among the homeless—so as to bring
each hungry, shelterless child
out of the cold,
and into the sanctuary
of their lives;
a community so strung together
that its weakest member
is treated like royalty;
a family who has found
the secret of the greatest
human joy—in serving someone else....
Not just a baby—
but the powerful Presence
of One who doesn't want us
to admire him,
but to follow.
—Daniel G. Bagby