

Bringing Justice into the World



Art by Sally Lynn Askins

Worship Resources for the Creative Church - Advent & Christmastide 2019

*Sacred Seasons, a series of worship packets with a peace and justice emphasis,
from Seeds of Hope Publishers: 602 James Avenue; Waco, TX 76706 • 254/755-7745
seededitor1@gmail.com • www.seedspublishers.org.*

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).

Staff and Volunteers

Editor: L. Katherine Cook, OEF

Copy Editor: Ellen Kuniyuki Brown

Social Media Editor: Chelle Samaniego

Liturgist: Guilherme Almeida

Editorial Assistant: Mackenzie Oviatt

Library Assistants: Bill Hughes

Gretchen Schwarz

Artists: Robert Askins, Sally Askins,

Peter Yuichi Clark, Erin Conaway,

Robert Darden, Van Darden,

Jesse Manning, Erin Kennedy Mayer,

Lenora Mathis, Kate Moore,

Sharon Rollins, Susan Smith,

Rebecca Ward

2019 Council of Stewards

Sara Alexander

Guilherme Almeida

Sally Lynn Askins (Vice President)

Meg Cullar

Derek S. Dodson

Linda Freeto

Sandy Londos

(Recording Secretary)

B. Michael Long (President)

Board of Advisors

Dale A. Barron

Daniel G. Bagby

Joseph Haag

Andy Loving

Kathryn Mueller

Jo Pendleton

Jacqueline L. Saxon

Ken Sehested

Jon Singletary

David Wilkinson

Leslie Withers

Statement of Purpose

Seeds of Hope, Inc., is a private, independent group of believers responding to a common burden for poor and hungry

Bringing Justice into the World

...in this worship packet:

- 3 A Word about This Packet
- 4 Theme Interpretation: What Do We Mean by 'Justice'?
- 5 A Liturgy for the First Sunday in Advent
- 6 Advent Prayer
- 7 Annunciation in South Sudan
- 8 A Liturgy for the Second Sunday in Advent
- 10 Are Your Hands Cold? A Children's Activity for Advent
- 11 A Liturgy for the Third Sunday in Advent
- 13 Staying Woke: A Homily for Advent
- 14 A Liturgy for the Fourth Sunday in Advent
- 16 Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings
- 17 Lessons & Carols for Christmas Eve
- 18 Christmas Eve Prayer
- 19 The Word That Was, Is and Will Be:
A Reading for Christmastide
- 20 A Liturgy for Christmas Day
- 21 Prayer for Christmas Day
- 22 A Liturgy for Epiphany
- 24 Benediction



Art by Sally Lynn Askins

people of God's world, and acting on 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; seedsestimator1@gmail.com; www.seedspublishers.org. Copyright © 2019.

Material in this packet is for the use of the purchasing faith community to enhance worship and increase awareness in economic justice issues. ISSN 0194-4495. Seeds of Hope, Inc., holds the 501(c)3 nonprofit tax status. All contributions above the subscription rate are fully tax-deductible.

Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New Revised Standard Version, Copyright © 2003, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission.

A Word about This Packet

As always, we are indebted to a lot of people for their generous contributions to this packet. I am indebted to our liturgical team—Guilherme Almeida, Erin Conaway and Alec Ylitalo—for the direction and theme, and for most of the elements of the liturgies.

The first thing we did is to look at the lectionary passages for Advent and Christmastide. We talked about the justice themes in the Messianic passages in the writings of the prophets, some of which are echoed in the Gospel of Matthew, from which all of the gospel readings are taken this year. We thought about how we seem to always expect Jesus to come and bring justice to the world, and we often forget that he commanded us to do the same.

The cover art, and much of the other art in the packet, was created by Sally Lynn Askins, our resident artist. Sally and I had long discussions about what “Bringing Justice into the World” meant (see page 4) before she put pencil to paper. I think you’ll appreciate the cover piece.

We have sprinkled various meditations, prayers and brief reflections throughout the packet, instead of including a full-fledged sermon. LeeAnn McKenna’s “Annunciation” piece is perhaps a little difficult to think about, but we think it is extremely germane to our theme. Mike Broadway’s short homily on “Staying Woke” was first preached for the African-American congregation in Raleigh, NC, where he attends church.

Mark McClintock came up with the idea of the “wreath of gloves” years ago, when he was the children’s minister at Seventh & James Baptist Church and very close to the Seeds office. We think it is still a great idea for engaging children in giving and being aware of the needs of others.

We are deeply grateful for all of you who subscribe to *Sacred Seasons*, and who make use of these gifts in your worship and work. As always, we are counting on you to adapt these contents to your own needs, resources and inclinations. We would love to hear about how you used them.

The contents of this packet are your congregation’s to use freely and we want you to share them with others. Our prayer is that they will give us the tools and inspiration we need to enter into a holy and joyous Advent and Christmastide—and to come out on the other side ready to bring justice into the world.

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



Art by Rebecca McLean

Theme Interpretation

What Do We Mean by 'Justice'?

by Katie Cook

What is justice? This word is sometimes problematic, because it is used in two distinctively different ways. To some, justice means retribution. It means that someone “pays” for some wrong that is done to another. The judicial system of the United States is organized around that definition of justice. College students take criminal justice courses. People who serve on the highest legal position in the country are called justices.

This is not the definition we are using in this packet. Sally Lynn Askins and I, in discussing the art on the cover, talked about this. She asked how I defined justice as we were referring to it. I had some difficulty. I said that justice happens when all of God’s people have food security, shelter, health care—all of our basic physical needs. It happens when everyone has the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness—not just white, male property owners who speak English.

About this time, her eyes started to glaze over, so I knew I needed to work on my ability to describe what I was thinking.

Our concept of justice comes from the Hebrew scriptures. As my friend, Rabbi Joshua Taub, explained it, *Tzedaka* is the Hebrew word we translate into justice. According to Joshua, Jewish law obligates each person to give a certain percent of his or her wealth to the poor. He or she might choose to give more, and he described that as what we understand as charity. He wrote about this in an article, “Moving from Charity to Justice,” that he wrote for *Seeds* years ago:

Treating our giving as acts of justice rather than occasional “warm fuzzies” can help us to continue to meet needs of those less fortunate, and to do so when others tend to forget them. Acts of justice are an obligation. We give, not because we feel like it, but because we must, and because we are able.

We could, of course, also talk about the origin of the word *charity*. This is the word used in 1 Corinthians 13. The King James translation uses *charity*, from *caritas*, the word St. Jerome used when

translating the passage into Latin in the fourth century. But the original Greek word is *agape*, the highest and most giving kind of love.

All of this leads me to say that justice is much more than random acts of kindness—although they are wonderful. And now I can see Sally slipping into a coma while trying to act like I am making some kind of sense.

The best vision I have been able to come up with for a just world as I see it is a prayer from, of all things, a *Star Trek* novel. On the planet Elohsia, the prayer is “May no one go hungry. May no one shiver in the cold. May no one cower in fear.” I submit that, when those criteria are met, there is justice.

We are entering Advent, a time when we remember that Christ brought light into the world and began the work of bringing justice. In this packet, our liturgical team wanted to emphasize the fact that we are commanded to continue this work.

When we stand before the manger, we should, of course, take time to bask in the wonder of the incarnation. We should breathe in the hope and joy of Advent. We all need encouragement to keep up the work we have chosen. We need comfort because we live in a world full of pain. We need the beauty and love of Advent and Christmas for the nourishment of our souls.

But then we need to get to work. We should, as Charles Dickens suggested, open our shut-up hearts freely and treat all people as fellow human beings.

Mahatma Ghandi said, “Be the change you wish to see in the world.”

Cherokee Chief Wilma Mankiller said, “There is no magical ‘they,’” and she went on to say that bringing her people out of poverty was going to take effort from everyone.

Jesus said, “You give them something to eat.”

We are called to continue the work that Jesus began. In these next five weeks, let us journey together through our dark and dangerous world with courage and hope. Let us work together to make it a more just world for all of creation.

—Katie Cook is the *Seeds of Hope* editor.

A Liturgy for the First Sunday in Advent

by Guilherme Almeida, Erin Conaway, Katie Cook & Alec Ylitalo

Processional Hymn

“View the Present Through the Promise”

Sing! A New Creation No. 90

WORDS: Thomas H. Troeger (b. 1945)

MUSIC: Roy Hopp (b. 1951)

FRANKLIN PARK - 8.5.8.5.8.8.8.5.

Call to Worship

One: We wait in a world full of empty stomachs, a world of “us” versus “them,” of borders and walls, and a world where hunger rumbles in our very souls.

Many: Our desire is to welcome the Bread of Life into that world: One who will multiply our loaves and fishes so all may eat, One who will break bread with

the stranger and the outsider, One who will nourish the souls of all who hear.

One: We wait in a world we don’t recognize anymore, lost and lonely, a world that harms and destroys, a world where rains of injustice batter us daily.

Many: Our desire is to welcome the Shepherd into that world: One who will gather in the scattered, One who will shoulder the wounded and sick, One who will guide all towards shelter and comfort.

One: We wait in a world that ignores the least of these, a world where the status quo is seemingly set in stone, a world that is fallen and hurting.

Many: Our desire is to welcome Justice into that world: One who will take up the cause of the poor, the marginalized, the lost, One who will turn over the tables of those who take advantage, One who will break the chains on all of us, on the world, on the law of sin and death.

Lighting the Hope candle:

We light the first candle to ignite a spirit of hope in the world. Injustice might seem to be everywhere we look in the world at the moment, but as this flame grows stronger, brighter, and warmer, so may our souls grow stronger in hope in the potential of this world as we wait for Hope incarnate.

Reading from the Prophets

Isaiah 2:1-5

Meditation of Preparation

The season of Advent means there is something on the horizon the likes of which we have never seen before.... What is possible is to not see it, to miss it, to turn just as it brushes past you. And you begin to grasp what it was you missed, like Moses in the cleft of the rock, watching God’s [back] fade in the distance. So stay. Sit. Linger. Tarry. Ponder. Wait. Behold. Wonder. There will be time enough for running. For rushing. For worrying. For pushing. For now, stay. Wait. Something is on the horizon.

—Jan L. Richardson



Art by Sally Lynn Askins

Гимн

"Blest Be the God of Israel"

Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 88

WORDS: Michael Perry (written in 1973)

MUSIC: Hal Hopson (written in 1983)

MERLE'S TUNE - 7.6.7.6.D

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 122

Reading from the Epistles

Romans 13:8-14

Гимн

"Arise, Your Light Is Come"

Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 87

WORDS: Ruth Duck (written in 1974)

MUSIC: William H. Walter (written in 1872)

FESTAL SONG - Short Meter SM (6.6.8.6.)

Gospel Reading

Matthew 24: 36-44

Meditation of Commitment

I don't think we'll understand Advent correctly until we see it as a preparation for a revolution.

—Robert Barron

Benediction

Go in peace, and may the hope of this waiting season prepare us to do the work that God-with-us will call us to do. Amen.

Advent Prayer

by Walter Brueggeman



In our secret yearnings
we wait for your coming,
and in our grinding despair
we doubt that you will.
And in this privileged place
we are surrounded by witnesses who yearn more than do we
and by those who despair more deeply than do we.
Look upon your church and its pastors
in this season of hope
which runs so quickly to fatigue
and in this season of yearning
which becomes so easily quarrelsome.
Give us the grace and the impatience
to wait for your coming to the bottom of our toes,
to the edges of our fingertips.
We do not want our several worlds to end.
Come in your power
and come in your weakness
in any case
and make all things new.
Amen.

Art by Sally Lynn Askins

—From *Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth*

Annunciation in South Sudan

by LeeAnn McKenna

Editor's note: The reflection below was written several years ago, shortly after Lee McKenna returned from South Sudan, where she led Conflict Transformation trainings.

At this writing, it is a week from Christmas. I am reading the account of the Annunciation in the Gospel of Luke, and it stops me in my tracks. The images on offer by Google are typically anachronistic, with Mary disturbed while at a desk reading a book, or unrealistic in their portrayal of some well-to-do chatelaine, draped in her blue robes, welcoming a wingéd visitor. My mind goes, in search of an image, to Faidah.

Faidah has just given birth. She is 15 years old, about Mary's age. There are plenty of mangers about, but the baby has, according to local custom, been placed on a grass mat on the floor—not held or suckled, but placed on the floor. Her first baby died after a few days; the second was stolen by cattle raiders, re-branded with the facial scars of the raiding tribe and sold to one of those husbands suffering the twin misfortunes of a barren first wife and insufficient cow-wealth to purchase a second.

Perhaps the custom has to do with the fact that one in every seven women dies in childbirth; one in seven babies dies in the first few years of life: why get attached to something that may go away? Sickened, killed, stolen, what does it matter how? The husband stops by to see the results—then leaves, perhaps most poignantly of all, without a single gesture of affection or gratitude for her labour. It's her job, after all. There will be no pastoral visitors, no kings from the east bearing gifts.

In this village, there are no sanitary napkins, no diapers, no toilets, no medications. Women are barely able to connect what happens monthly with the production of babies—their purpose in life. Blood is greeted with fear. Here a woman is meant to be either lactating or pregnant, with enough strength left over to tend livestock, cultivate the family plot, cook, clean, and look after the children that have managed to survive.

Here in Lankein, outside of urban centres, the economy is not currency-based and so the fact that more than 90 percent of the population lives on less

than half-dollar a day is mostly meaningless. The only currency that matters is cattle.

Children wear the rags inherited from older siblings; school is not an option in vast reaches of this country where the literacy rate is the second lowest in the world. Imperial bombardment keeps people on the move, despite the six-year-old *pax*. Yes, this feels closer to Mary's world; the one interrupted.

—LeeAnn McKenna is a global trainer-facilitator in Conflict Transformation, specialising in the intersections of violence with gender, race, tribe, religion and economics. Her feature story, "The Gender Fishbowl," in the summer 2016 issue of *Hunger News & Hope on women and poverty*, won an Associated Church Press award. For more information about LeeAnn's work, go to www.partera.ca.



Art by John Richardson

A Liturgy for the Second Sunday in Advent

by Guilherme Almeida, Erin Conaway, Katie Cook & Alec Ylitalo

Processional Hymn

“God of Justice Ever Flowing”

Sing! A New Creation No. 101

WORDS: Kathleen R. Moore (20th Century)

MUSIC: Columbian Harmony (1825)

HOLY MANNA - 8.7.8.7.D.

Call to Worship

One: We wait in a world full of empty stomachs, a world of us versus them, of borders and walls, and a world where hunger rumbles in our very souls.

Many: Our desire is to welcome the Bread of Life into that world: One who will multiply our loaves and fishes so all may eat, One who will break bread with the stranger and the outsider, One who will nourish the souls of all who hear.

One: We wait in a world we don't recognize anymore, lost and lonely, a world that harms and destroys, a world where rains of injustice batter us daily.

Many: Our desire is to welcome the Shepherd into that world: One who will gather in the scattered, One who will shoulder the wounded and sick, One who will guide all towards shelter and comfort.

One: We wait in a world that ignores the least of these, a world where the status quo is seemingly set in stone, a world that is fallen and hurting.

Many: Our desire is to welcome Justice into that world: One who will take up the cause of the poor, the marginalized, the lost, One who will turn over the tables of those who take advantage, One who will break the chains on all of us, on the world, on the law of sin and death.

Lighting the Peace candle

We light the second candle to ignite a spirit of peace in the world. Anger, hostility, and war might seem to clamor all around us, but as this flame gently whispers into the darkness, so may our souls whisper peace and resolution in this world as we wait for Peace incarnate.

Reading from the Prophets

Isaiah 11:1-10

Reading from the Psalms

Psalms 72 or 72:1-8

Hymn

“My Soul in Stillness Waits”

Sing! A New Creation No. 95

WORDS and MUSIC: Marty Haugen (b. 1950)

[No Meter Info]

Reading from the Epistles:

Romans 15:4-13



Art by Sally Lynn Askins

Meditation of Preparation

The Lord is coming, always coming. When you have ears to hear and eyes to see, you will recognize him at any moment of your life. Life is Advent; life is recognizing the coming of the Lord.

—Henri Nouwen

Гимн

“Savior of the Nations, Come”

The Worship Church Hymnal No. 138

WORDS: Attributed to Ambrose of Milan (4th Century);

German version, Martin Luther (1523);
tr. Calvin Seerveld, 1984

MUSIC: Enchiridia, Erfurt, 1524;

harm. Seth Calvisius, 1594

NUN KOMM, DER HEIDEN HEILAND -
7.7.7.7.

Reading from the Gospels

Matthew 3:1-12

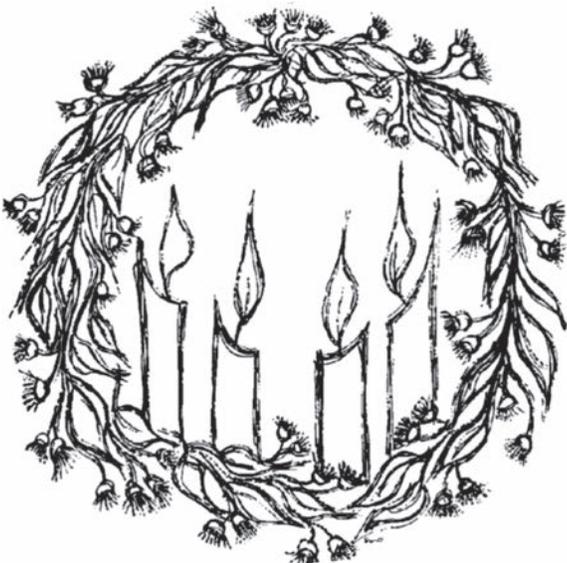
Meditation of Commitment

At this Christmas when Christ comes, will He find a warm heart? Mark the season of Advent by loving and serving the others with God’s own love and concern.

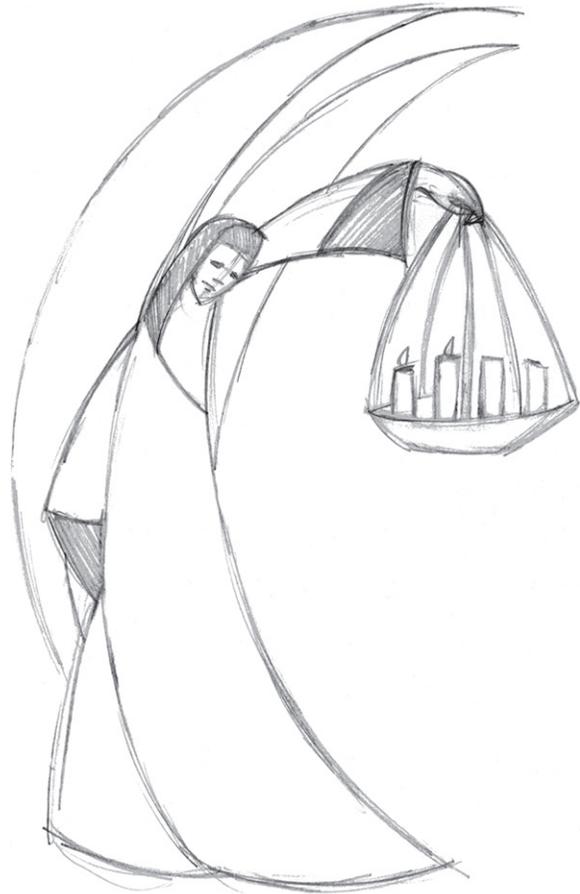
—Mother Teresa

Benediction

Go in peace and, as we go from this place, may we be drenched by the Holy Spirit, so that we can embody that peace into the broken world. Amen.



Art by Susan Daily, IBVM



Art by Sally Lyinn Askins

Peace between nations

Peace between neighbors

Peace between lovers

In love of the God of life

Peace between man and woman

Peace between parent and child

Peace between brother and sister

The peace of Christ above all peace

Bless O Christ my face

Let my face bless everything

Bless O Christ my eyes

Let my eyes bless all they see

Recall the events of the day
and pray for justice and peace.

—J. Philip Newell, *Celtic Prayers for Iona*

Are Your Hands Cold?

A Children's Activity for Advent

by Mark McClintock



An Idea for Sunday School

Find the book *A Rose for Abby* and read it to the children during Sunday school. It will probably take about 10 minutes to read the book. (We recommend that you do this before you lead with the following children's sermon.)

Children's Sermon

Bring a bucket of ice cubes—one for each child. You may want to put towels on the floor to catch any drips. Give each child an ice cube to hold in her or his hands while you read James 2:14-17 aloud. After a minute or two, collect the ice in the bucket.

Ask the children, "Does anybody have cold hands?" After the children respond, say, "Well, we don't want anybody to go away with cold hands, do we? Let's see... 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill.' How's that? Are everybody's hands warmer now? No? You mean, just telling somebody to be warm doesn't work? Well, I guess that's what the Bible means when it says we need to do more than believe in God. We need to DO what God says."

Say, "Right here in our city, there are people who have no home. They wander around during the day and sleep on the streets at night. Do you think some

of them might have cold hands? Should we go up to those people and say, 'Keep warm'? No? Then what could we DO about their cold hands?"

Listen to the children's suggestions. Say, "You've had some good ideas. Do you remember the book that we read earlier, *A Rose for Abby*? Abby was a little girl who gave a pair of gloves to a woman who lived in the street. We're going to make a wreath full of gloves and mittens to donate to a homeless shelter. Then, as people without homes come to the shelters, they can choose a pair of gloves and keep them to warm their hands."

Explain how, where, and when church members may donate gloves and when the children will help assemble the wreath or wreaths.

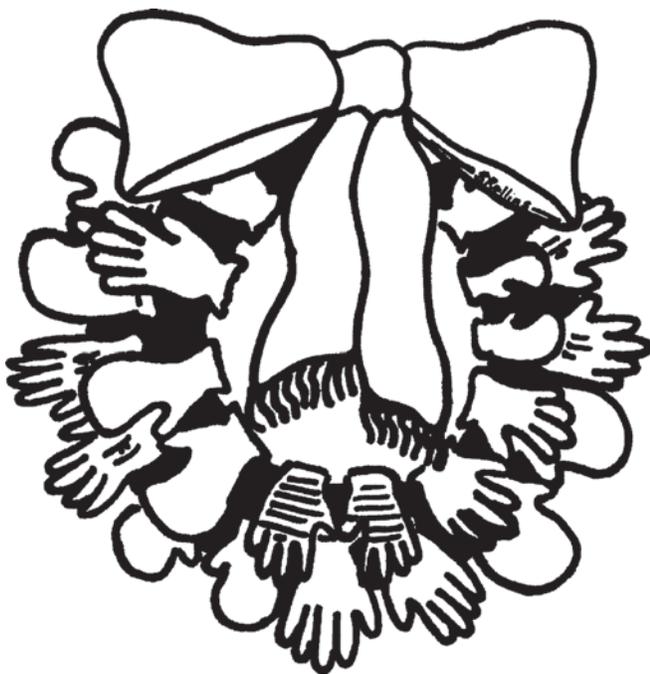
End with a prayer. "God, thank you for our hands. Thank you for smooth hands and wrinkled hands, hands with dimples and hands with scars, hands of every shape, size and color. Help those of us with warm hands to share that warmth with those who have cold hands. Help us join hands with others to make the world a place where nobody is left out in the cold. Amen."

Wreath of Hands Missions Activity

With the children's help, collect gloves and mittens from people in the church and pin them to a hoop or artificial wreath. (We recommend a styrofoam form wrapped in cloth.) Tell the children that these gloves are going to warm the hands of people who have no gloves. (The children's sermon above is a possible way to introduce the children to the idea.)

Depending on the number of children in your group and how many gloves you collect, you may choose to make several wreaths. Choose a day when the children can go with you to take the wreath(s) to a homeless shelter or other distribution center.

—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.



Art by Sharon R. Rollins

A Liturgy for the Third Sunday in Advent

by Guilherme Almeida, Erin Conaway, Katie Cook & Alec Ylitalo

Processional Hymn

“Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus”

Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 83

WORDS: Charles Wesley, 1744

MUSIC: Rowland H. Prichard, 1830

HYFRYDOL - 8.7.8.7.D.

Call to Worship

One: We wait in a world full of empty stomachs, a world of us versus them, of borders and walls, and a world where hunger rumbles in our very souls.

Many: Our desire is to welcome the Bread of Life into that world: One who will multiply our loaves and fishes so all may eat, One who will break bread with the stranger and the outsider, One who will nourish the souls of all who hear.

One: We wait in a world we don't recognize anymore, lost and lonely, a world that harms and destroys, a world where rains of injustice batter us daily.

Many: Our desire is to welcome the Shepherd into that world: One who will gather in the scattered, One who will shoulder the wounded and sick, One who will guide all towards shelter and comfort.

One: We wait in a world that ignores the least of these, a world where the status quo is seemingly set in stone, a world that is fallen and hurting.

Many: Our desire is to welcome Justice into that world: One who will take up the cause of the poor, the marginalized, the lost, One who will turn over the tables of those who take advantage, One who will break the chains on all of us, on the world, on the law of sin and death.

Lighting the Joy candle

We light the third candle to ignite a spirit of joy in the world. With winter comes coldness and little sunlight, but as this flame sparks and dances, so may our souls be sparked into joy in warmth and light as we wait for Joy incarnate.

Reading from the Prophets

Isaiah 35:1-10

Meditation of Preparation

God's movement is often abrupt and unsettling rather than predictable and settling.

—Michael Joseph Brown

Hymn

“Awake! Awake and Greet the New Morn”

Sing! A New Creation No. 91

WORDS and MUSIC: Marty Haugen (b. 1950)

REJOICE REJOICE - 9.8.9.8.8.7.8.9.

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 146

(Alternate reading: Luke 1:46b-55)



Art by Sally Lynn Askins

Reading from the Epistles

James 5:7-10

Hymn

"Sing a New Song to the Lord"

Sing! A New Creation No. 112

WORDS: Psalm 98;

vers. Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926)

MUSIC: David G. Wilson (b. 1940)

ON SLOW SQUARE - 7.7.11.8.

Reading from the Gospels

Matthew 11:2-11

Meditation of Commitment

...And then, just when everything is bearing down on us to such an extent that we can scarcely withstand it, the Christmas message comes to tell us that all our ideas are wrong, and that what we take to be evil and dark is really good and light because it comes from God. Our eyes are at fault, that is all. God is in the manger, wealth in poverty, light in darkness, succor in abandonment. No evil can befall us; whatever men may do to us, they cannot but serve the God who is secretly revealed as love and rules the world and our lives.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *God is in the Manger*

Benediction

Go in peace, and may the joy in our hearts overflow into loving service to those who need it most. Amen.



Art by René Boldt

Into this world,
this demented inn,

in which there is absolutely no room for Him at all, Christ has come uninvited. But because He cannot be at home in it, because He is out of place in it, and yet He must be in it, His place is with those others for whom there is no room. His place is with those who do not belong, who are rejected by power because they are regarded as weak, those who are discredited, who are denied the status of persons, tortured, exterminated. With those for whom there is no room,
Christ is present in this world.

—Thomas Merton, *Raids on the Unspeaking*

Staying Woke

A Homily for Advent

by Mike Broadway



In this advent season of awaiting the birth of Jesus, how shall we wait? Mary waited through an unexpected pregnancy, through all the bodily struggles of pregnancy, all its uncertainties, all its dangers, for what she could only hope against hope to be true.

Joseph waited in his confusion and shame that he had been the greatest fool in the world to marry this pregnant girl. The shepherds waited out in the fields, doing the dirty work of the world, wondering if and when their time would ever come.

And in our day we wait for the time when the love of learning and longing of every soul to achieve matters as much as the anger of the privileged, a time when everyone can gain access to education at any level. We wait for the time when people in authority won't shoot first and tell lies later, when black lives matter equally.

We wait for the time when violence toward any is understood as violence against all. We wait for a time when politicians cannot build a following through stoking the fires of fear and hatred toward people whose skin or religion is different from our own. We wait for the time that a preacher cannot get cheers and applause for telling his congregation to get a gun and be ready to kill the enemy of the moment.

We wait for a time when the refugee, the homeless, the jobless, the orphan, the hungry, the weak, when every one of God's children has a place of honor, love, and safety in this world.



If we wait carelessly, sleepily, and without expectation, we may miss it when God shows up. While we wait, we must wait as awake people. We need our eyes wide open.

We need to stay "woke." God is moving here and now. If I don't receive the refugee while I wait, how will I recognize God's showing up in the life of a refugee family trying to save the life of their baby? If I don't get into the streets with young people crying out for justice, how will I know when the King of Heaven goes walking down those streets and alleys to lift up the lowly and outcast? If I am not where Jesus is walking, how will I hear the call to follow him?

I must be awake, ready, anticipating the mighty work of God. When John preached, people from all walks of life came out to hear and listen. They were shaken by his message. Awakened, they asked him what they should do.

In all cases, he pointed them toward a life of justice. He told them to wake up to justice in living with their neighbors. He told them to stay ready to do the right thing.

He told them to trust in God and not in the ways they could game the system in their own favor. And the gospels say that even though he told them they had to change their ways, they *heard the good news* in that message.

God has a better way for you and for me. We are waiting for it, and we can't afford to sleep through its coming. We don't know just when God will sweep away the structures of injustice, but God will do it.

We don't know what the means will be, but God will do it. We want to be about the right work when it happens. When a new heaven and a new earth start to appear, we need to be in God's vicinity.

We need to be awake doing the work God has given us. While we wait, we need to stay woke. Let's do this together. Let's stay woke in Advent. Let's stay woke, because God will do it. Amen.

—Mike Broadway teaches ethics at Shaw University Divinity School in Raleigh, NC.

A Liturgy for the Fourth Sunday in Advent

by Guilherme Almeida, Erin Conaway, Katie Cook & Alec Ylitalo

Processional Hymn

“The King of Glory Comes”

The Worshipping Church Hymnal No. 134

WORDS: Willard F. Jabusch, 1966

MUSIC: Traditional Israeli Melody;
arr. John Ferguson, 1973

PROMISED ONE - 12.12.Refrain

Call to Worship

One: We wait in a world full of empty stomachs, a world of us versus them, of borders and walls, and a world where hunger rumbles in our very souls.

Many: Our desire is to welcome the Bread of Life into that world: One who will multiply our loaves and

fishes so all may eat, One who will break bread with the stranger and the outsider, One who will nourish the souls of all who hear.

One: We wait in a world we don't recognize anymore, lost and lonely, a world that harms and destroys, a world where rains of injustice batter us daily.

Many: Our desire is to welcome the Shepherd into that world: One who will gather in the scattered, One who will shoulder the wounded and sick, One who will guide all towards shelter and comfort.

One: We wait in a world that ignores the least of these, a world where the status quo is seemingly set in stone, a world that is fallen and hurting.

Many: Our desire is to welcome Justice into that world: One who will take up the cause of the poor, the marginalized, the lost, One who will turn over the tables of those who take advantage, One who will break the chains on all of us, on the world, on the law of sin and death.

Lighting the Love candle

We light the fourth candle to ignite a spirit of love in the world. For apathy and hatred run without restraint in this world, but as this flame warms us to our core, so may our souls warm to love of all of God's creation as we wait for Love incarnate.

Reading from the Prophets

Isaiah 7:10-16

Meditation of Preparation

By his own will Christ was dependent on Mary during Advent: he was absolutely helpless; he could go nowhere but where she chose to take him; he could not speak; her breathing was his breath; his heart beat in the beating of her heart.... In the seasons of our Advent—waking, working, eating, sleeping, being—each breath is a breathing of Christ into the world.

—Caryll Houselander



Art by Sally Lynn Askins

Гимн

“For Ages Women Hoped and Prayed”
The Worshipping Church Hymnal No. 143
WORDS: Jane Parker Huber, 1986
MUSIC: John B. Dykes, 1868
VOX DILECTI - C.M.D.

Reading from the Psalms
Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

Reading from the Epistles
Romans 1:1-7

Гимн

“Of the Parent’s Heart Begotten”
The New Century Hymnal No. 118
WORDS: Marcus Aurelius Clemens Prudentius
(348-413 AD); tr. *The New Century Hymnal*, 1993
MUSIC: Medieval Plainsong

from Petri’s *Piae Cantiones*, 1582;
harm. C. Winfred Douglas, 1940
DIVINUM MYSTERIUM - 8.7.8.7.8.7.7.

Reading from the Gospels
Matthew 1:18-25

Meditation of Commitment

The mystery of the poor is this: That they are Jesus, and what you do for them you do for Him. It is the only way we have of knowing and believing in our love. The mystery of poverty is that by sharing in it, making ourselves poor in giving to others, we increase our knowledge of and belief in love.

—Dorothy Day

Benediction

Go in peace, and may we love one another as Christ taught us. May we love in truth and action. May we learn together the true meaning of love. Amen.

If God chooses Mary
as his instrument,
if God himself wants
to come into this world
in the manger at Bethlehem,
that is no idyllic family affair,
but the beginning
of a complete turnaround,
a reordering of
everything on Earth.
If we wish to take part in this
Advent and Christmas event,
then we cannot simply be
bystanders or onlookers,
as if we were at the theater,
enjoying all the
cheerful images.
No, we ourselves are swept up
into the action there,
into this conversion
of all things.
We have to play our part too
on this stage,
for the spectator is
already an actor.
We cannot withdraw.
—Dietrich Bonhoeffer,
The Mystery of Holy Night



Art by Sally Lynn Askins

Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings

In the silence of a midwinter dusk, there is a sound so faint that for all you can tell it may be only the sound of the silence itself. You hold your breath to listen. You are aware of the beating of your heart. The extraordinary thing that is about to happen is matched only by the extraordinary moment just before it happens. Advent is the name of that moment.
—Frederick Buechner

My idea of Christmas, whether old-fashioned or modern, is very simple: loving others. Come to think of it, why do we have to wait for Christmas to do that?
—Bob Hope

And the Grinch, with his Grinch-feet ice cold in the snow, stood puzzling and puzzling, how could it be so? It came without ribbons. It came without tags. It came without packages, boxes or bags. And he puzzled and puzzled 'till his puzzler was sore. Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before. What if Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store. What if Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit more.
—Dr. Seuss

Christmas gift suggestions: To your enemy, forgiveness. To an opponent, tolerance. To a friend, heart. To a customer, service. To all, charity. To every child, a good example. To you, respect.
—Oren Arnold

The spirit of Christmas is the spirit of love and of generosity and of goodness. It illuminates the picture window of the soul, and we look out upon the world's busy life and become more interested in people than in things.
—Thomas S. Monson

Let us remember that the Christmas heart is a giving heart, a wide-open heart that thinks of others first. The birth of the baby Jesus stands as the most significant event in all history, because it has meant the pouring into a sick world of the healing medicine of love which has transformed all manner of hearts for almost two thousand years... Underneath all the bulging bundles is this beating Christmas heart.
—George Matthew Adams

"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*

Miss Velma Westbury used to say, "If you just love the folks that's easy to love, that really ain't no love at all." She said, "If you love one, you have to love 'em all." That is the radical message of Easter. That is the glad tidings of Christmas.... Of course, some folks said Miss Velma was crazy.
—Will Campbell



We think of him as safe beneath the steeple,
Or cosy in a crib beside the font,
But he is with a million displaced people
On the long road of weariness and want.
For even as we sing our final carol
His family is up and on that road,
Fleeing the wrath of someone else's quarrel,
Glancing behind and shouldering their load.
Whilst Herod rages still from his dark tower,
Christ clings to Mary, fingers tightly curled,
The lambs are slaughtered by the men of power,
And death squads spread their curse
across the world.
But every Herod dies, and comes alone
To stand before the Lamb upon the throne.

—Malcolm Guite, *Sounding the Seasons: Seventy Sonnets for the Christian Year*,
(Canterbury Press Norwich, London: 2012)

Lessons & Carols for Christmas Eve

by Guilherme Almeida, Erin Conaway, Katie Cook & Alec Ylitalo

Art by Sally Lynn Askins



Meditation of Preparation

Politicians compete for the highest offices. Business tycoons scramble for a bigger and bigger piece of the pie. Armies march and scientists study and philosophers philosophise and preachers preach and labourers sweat. But in that silent baby, lying in that humble manger, there pulses more potential power and wisdom and grace and aliveness than all the rest of us can imagine.

—Brian D. McLaren

First Lesson

Isaiah 9:2-7

Lighting of the Hope Candle

Carol

“On Christmas Night All Christians Sing”

Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 133

WORDS: English Carol

MUSIC: English Carol;

harm. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1912

SUSSEX CAROL - 8.8.8.8.8.8.

Second Lesson

Psalm 96

Lighting of the Peace Candle

Carol

“Jesus Came to Dwell Among Us”

Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 140

WORDS: Beth Rice Luttrell, 2000

MUSIC: Benjamin Harlan, 2000

HARLAN - 8.7.8.7. with Refrain

Third Lesson

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

Lighting of the Joy Candle

Carol

“Gloria / Glory”

Sing! A New Creation No. 116

WORDS: Luke 2:14

MUSIC: Pablo Sosa (b. 1947), Argentina

CUEQUITA - Irregular Meter

Fourth Lesson

Matthew 1:18-25

Lighting of the Love Candle

Carol

“Sing a Different Song”

The New Century Hymnal No. 150

WORDS: *The Iona Community*, 1987; alt.

MUSIC: John Bell, 1987

DIFFERENT SONG - 10.10.6.6.10.

Fifth Lesson

John 1:1-14

Lighting of the Christ Candle

Meditation of Commitment

We light the final candle, the Christ candle, to ignite a spirit of Emmanuel in the world. We celebrate

that this flame represents the center of our faith, the inspiration for our actions, the forgiveness and grace that abound, God with us. May it burn from everlasting to everlasting as we welcome Justice incarnate.

—Alec Ylitalo

Carol

“Silent Night, Holy Night”

Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 134

WORDS: Joseph Mohr, 1818;

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

tr. Anonymous (st. 2,4)

MUSIC: Franz Grüber, 1818

STILLE NACHT - Irregular Meter

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.

—Doug Donley, pastor of University Baptist Church in Minneapolis, MN

Christmas Eve Prayer

by Erin Conaway

God, we are overwhelmingly grateful for this family of faith and for a beautiful sanctuary in which to gather together to worship you. The tree is lit, the poinsettias are placed, the greens are hung with care and precision and, for many in this room, that matches the story we bring into this place and to the manger as we worship you.

We give you thanks for the carols of the season and the joyous music we play and sing and hear. We give you thanks for light and life and the ecstasy of giving gifts in remembrance of the ultimate gift you have given to us—your grace and your love.

Lord, you know that there are others of us gathered in this room who are just praying the flicker of light emanating from the candles doesn't blow out because it's all we have and all we can see in this season of darkness. We may have the stockings hung up, but they were put there out of obligation and routine, and not from an overflow of our hearts or minds or souls. And we trust that you are with us—not just by fulfillment of your covenant and your fidelity, but by your choice and your love.

And you know what it is to not have a perfect Christmas. You came into this world against so many odds. You were born to humble parents who did not wrap you in the finest fabric in the land, but wrapped you up in what they had. While they may not have prepared a palatial place for you to lay your head, they loved you with all of their hearts and strength and might.

And that is what you want from us as well. Love. To love you with all of who we are and all of who we know ourselves to be in this moment. And to love our neighbors with all of our hearts and souls and minds and strength. You are with us. Emmanuel has come to us and dwells with us. Thank you, thank you, thank you. And help us, help us, help us. Amen.

—Erin Conaway is pastor of Seventh & James Baptist Church, where the Seeds offices are housed, and is a member of the Sacred Seasons liturgical team.



Art by Sally Lynn Askins

The Word That Was, Is and Will Be

A Reading for Christmastide

by Raymond Bailey

Text: Excerpts from Isaiah 9, Luke 2, John 1

READER 1: In the beginning...

READER 2: In the beginning...

READER 1: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

READER 2: In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered.

READER 1: Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

READER 2: While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

READER 1: And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

READER 2: There were shepherds in the fields keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

READER 1: But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger."

READER 2: And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

READER 1: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

READERS 1 & 2: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

READER 2: The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.

READER 1: For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named

READER 2: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

READER 1: From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

READER 2: His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

READER 1: Let us go now and see this thing that has taken place which the Lord has made known to us.

READER 2: The Word has been made known to us.

READER 1: So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.

READER 2: The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

READER 1: Let us glorify and praise God and make known what has been told us about this child.

—Raymond Bailey is a retired pastor and professor of homiletics living in Frankfort, KY. For more than 15 years, he served as pastor of Seventh & James Baptist Church. During that time, he was a champion for the Seeds ministry and contributed many sermons and writings—as he still does.

A Liturgy for Christmas Day

by Guilherme Almeida, Erin Conaway, Katie Cook & Alec Ylitalo

Processional Hymn

“Angels We Have Heard on High”

Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 125

WORDS: Trad. French Carol; tr. *Crown of Jesus*, 1862

MUSIC: French Carol Melody, arr. Edward Shippen Barnes, 1937; harm. Austin Lovelace, 1964, alt.

GLORIA - 7.7.7.7. with Refrain

Call to Worship

One: We welcome Christ into a world full of empty stomachs, a world of “us” versus “them,” of borders and walls, and a world where hunger rumbles in our very souls.

Many: We welcome the Bread of Life into that world: One who will multiply our loaves and fishes so all may eat, One who will break bread with the stranger and the outsider, One who will nourish the souls of all who hear.

One: We welcome Christ into a world we don’t recognize anymore, lost and lonely, a world that harms and destroys, a world where rains of injustice batter us daily.

Many: We welcome the Shepherd into that world: One who will gather in the scattered, One who will shoulder the wounded and sick, One who will guide all towards shelter and comfort.

One: We welcome Christ into a world that ignores the least of these, a world where the status quo is seemingly set in stone, a world that is fallen and hurting.

Many: We welcome Justice into that world: One who will take up the cause of the poor, the marginalized, the lost, One who will turn over the tables of those who take advantage, One who will break the chains on all of us, on the world, on the law of sin and death.

Lighting of the Five Candles

As we light the candle of hope, let us commit ourselves to bringing hope to the hopeless.

As we light the candle of peace, let us commit ourselves to bringing peace into the conflicts around us.

As we light the candle of joy, let us commit ourselves to be harbingers of joy to the people around us.

As we light the candle of love, let us commit

ourselves to acting in love, even when it is difficult.

As we light the Christ candle, let us invite Christ into our hearts and commit ourselves to walking in the path he made for us.

Reading from the Prophets

Isaiah 52:7-10

Meditation of Preparation

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

—Gustavo Gutierrez, *The God of Life*



Art by Gertrud Nelson

Hymn

“Let Your Gladness Banish Sadness”

Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 121

WORDS: Slovak version of 14th Century Latin text;

tr. Jaroslav J. Vajda, 1960

MUSIC: Michael Burkhardt, 1998, alt.

HEAVEN’S GIFT - 14.14.6.6.14.

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 98

Meditation

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

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Reading from the Epistles

Hebrews 1:1-4

Hymn

“Jesus, Jesus, Oh, What a Wonderful Child”

Sing! A New Creation No. 108

WORDS: Doc Bagby

MUSIC: Margaret Allison (b. 1920);

harm. Jeffrey Radford (b. 1953)

WONDERFUL CHILD, Irregular Meter

Gospel Reading

John 1:1-14

Meditation of Preparation

Benediction

O glorious God, every Christmas we come to the manger, kneel alongside the shepherds and kings, and wonder anew at your Extravagant Gift. You have given yourself to us,

affirmed our worth to you, and from your fullness we have all received grace upon grace. In the presence of your unconditional Love and pure Light, we yearn to be transformed into extravagant gifts ourselves. Please give us the wisdom and courage to be poured out as wine upon the altar for you, to be broken as bread to feed the hungry for you, to love with humble abandon and childlike joy.

—Deborah E. Harris

Prayer for Christmas Day

by Erin Conaway

Holy God, we come before you on Christmas Day. In many ways it is finished. The preparations have been made. The waiting is over. The candles are flickering with Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. We’ve been to parties, we’ve wrapped the presents, we’ve sung carols, we’ve heard the story.

In many ways it is finished. We’ve weathered this season of watching and waiting, anticipating your arrival in our world, trying faithfully and, in many ways desperately, to prepare our hearts for the miracle of your incarnation. Calling down your presence, begging the heavens to be torn apart, looking for the valleys to be lifted and the mountains lowered, praying the winding road will form itself into a straight path. And here we are at the celebration of your birth with the Christ Candle glowing in our sanctuary. It is finished.

And it is just beginning. For you came into the world not as a grown man with a completed agenda and a written script. You came into the world under the watchful eye of two parents who themselves couldn’t afford this miraculous event in their lives. So they did what they could do and laid you down in a trough for animals. You came into this world with the chorus of angels swirling about you and the bleating of sheep and the whinnying sounds of the mules adding their voices.

It is just beginning. You came into this world with gifts for a king and under the threat of death by a king who sat on a lower throne.

It is just beginning. An infant—with infinite possibilities for tragedy and triumph, searing pain and transcending hope, understanding and confusion.

It is just beginning. And so it is with us—just beginning as we gather together in your name to celebrate your incarnation in our lives and in our world. Begin anew your hope that transcends our pain, begin anew your peace that transforms the world, begin anew the unadulterated joy in our hearts, begin anew the love you created us to have for our neighbors, for ourselves, for you. Begin again today, as we feel your birth in our hearts and sing of its wonder with our lives for we do so as we pray in the present name of Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

A Liturgy for Epiphany

by Guilherme Almeida, Erin Conaway, Katie Cook & Alec Ylitalo

Processional Hymn

“O Morning Star, How Clear and Bright”

The New Century Hymnal No. 158

WORDS: Philipp Nicolai, 1598;

tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1863; alt.

MUSIC: Philipp Nicolai, 1598;

harm. J. S. Bach, c. 1731

WIE SCHÖN LEUCHTET - 8.8.7.8.8.7.4.8.4.8.

Call to Worship

One: Light of the World, Emmanuel, Justice.

*Many: No matter the name we call out, we welcome
God incarnate into the world.*

One: We bring gifts that mean the world to us and
lay them at the feet of the manger,

*Many: But it is the gifts that Christ brings to the
world that will forever change it.*

One: The brightness of dawn this day will only be
eclipsed by the light piercing the empty tomb.

*Many: As we follow from infant lowly to resurrected
one, may we learn the ways of humility, righteousness,
and justice along the Way.*

Reading from the Prophets

Isaiah 60:1-6

Meditation of Preparation

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

“Los Magos que Llegaron a Belén / The Magi Went to Bethl’hem Long Ago”

Sing! A New Creation No. 118

WORDS and MUSIC: Trad. Puerto Rican Carol;

tr. George K. Evans (b. 1917)

ISLA DEL ENCANTO - 12.12. with Refrain

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14

Reading from the Epistles

Ephesians 3:1-12

Hymn

“O Sing a Song of Bethlehem”

Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 164

WORDS: Louis F. Benson, 1889

MUSIC: Trad. English Melody; arr. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1906



Art by Sally Lynn Askins

Gospel Reading

Matthew 2:1-12

Meditation of Commitment

Advent's intention is to awaken the most profound and basic emotional memory within us, namely, the memory of the God who became a child. This is a healing memory; it brings hope. The purpose of the Church's year is continually to rehearse her great history of memories, to awaken the heart's memory so that it can discern the star of hope.

—Pope Benedict XVI

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.

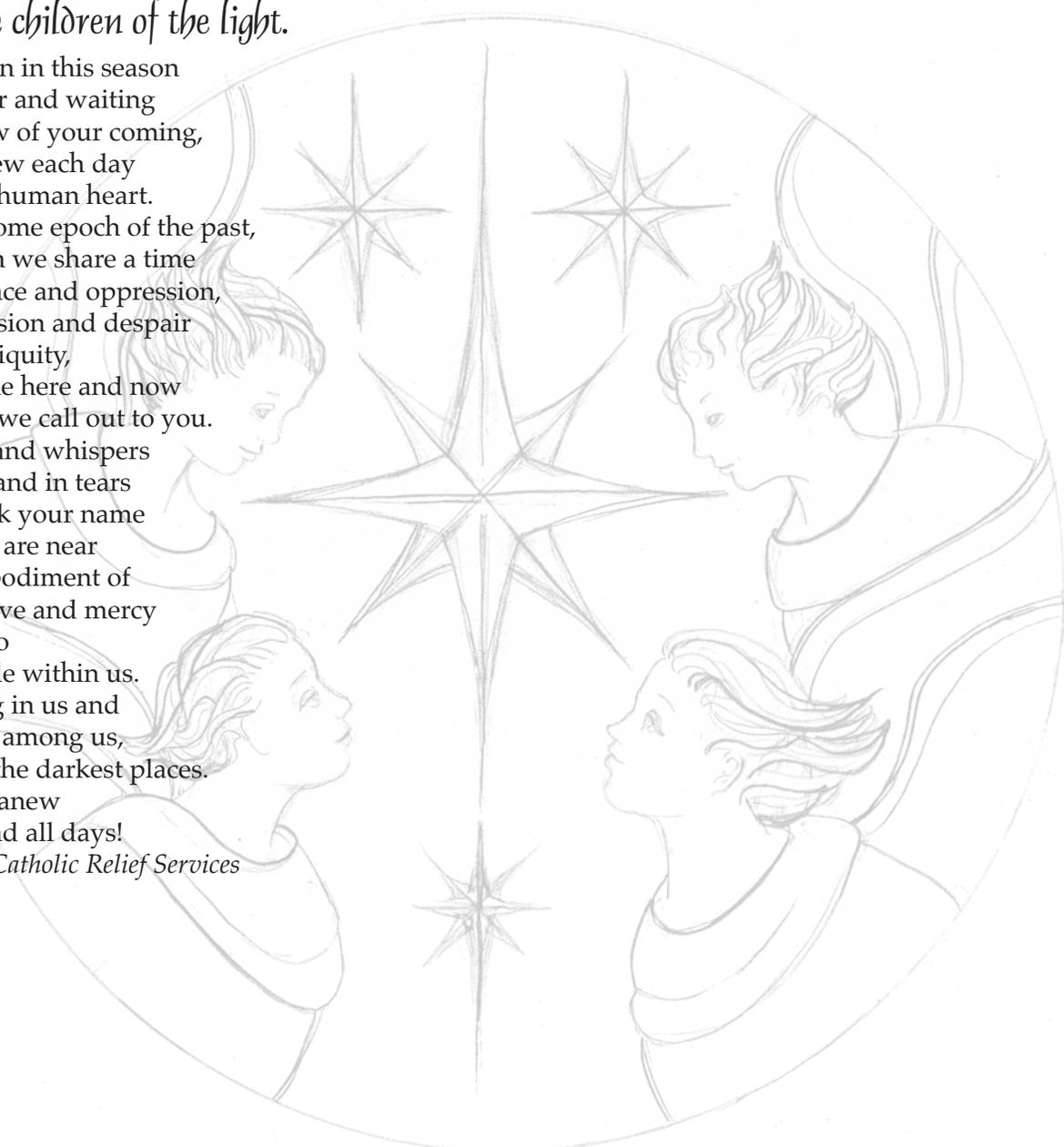
—Adapted from Thomas Hoffman's *A Child in Winter*

We are children of the light.

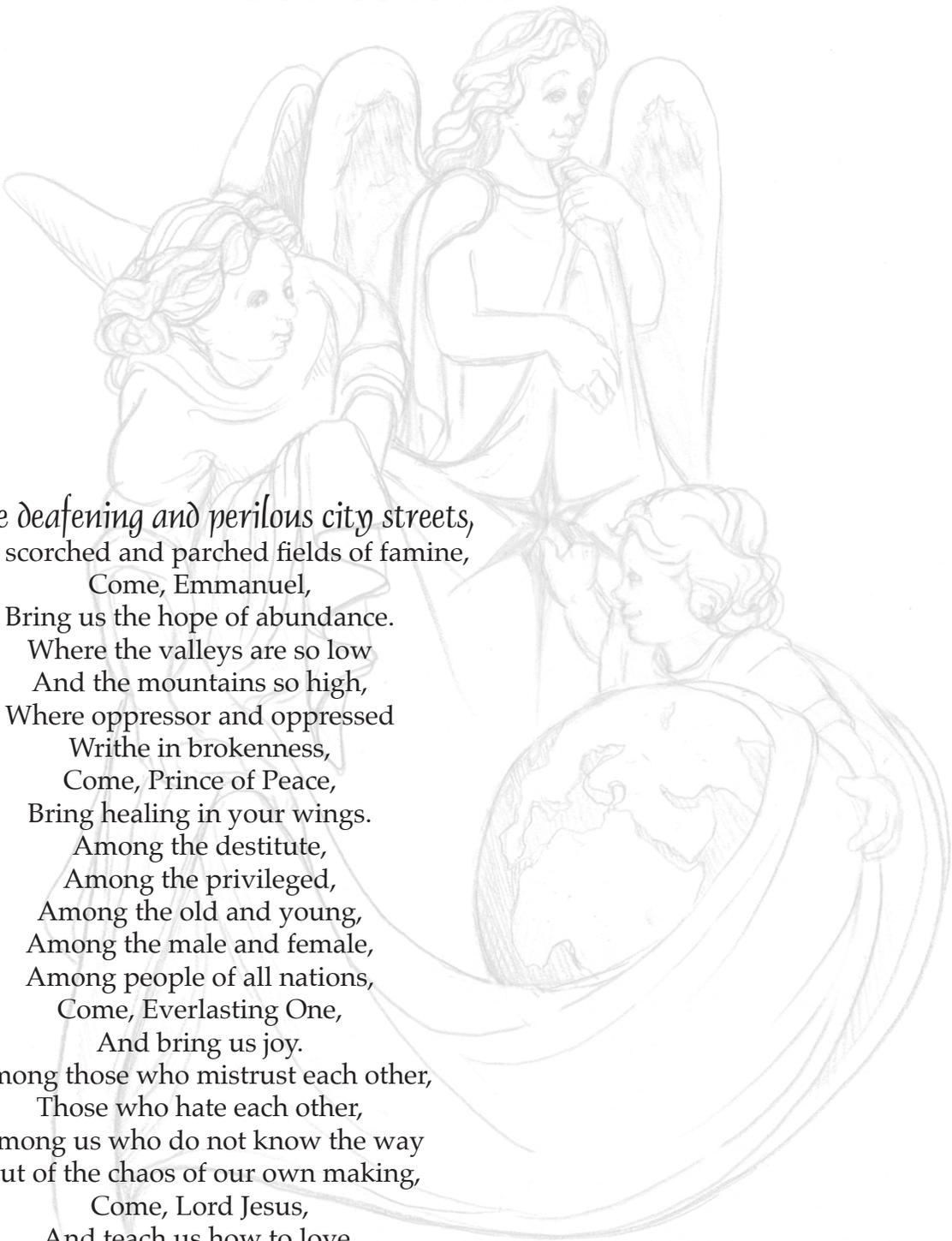
And even in this season
of prayer and waiting
We know of your coming,
born anew each day
into the human heart.
Not in some epoch of the past,
although we share a time
of violence and oppression,
of confusion and despair
with antiquity,
But in the here and now
Even as we call out to you.
In cries and whispers
In song and in tears
We speak your name
and you are near
The embodiment of
God's love and mercy
Born into
the cradle within us.
Growing in us and
walking among us,
even in the darkest places.
Be born anew
today and all days!

—From *Catholic Relief Services*

Art by Sally Lynn Atkins



Benediction



*To the deafening and perilous city streets,
to the scorched and parched fields of famine,*

Come, Emmanuel,

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 young,

Among the male and 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 us 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