

Fabric between...

Tearing the



Worship Resources for the Creative Church - Advent/Christmastide 2023

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art by Sally Lynn Askins

Sacred Seasons



Worship Tools for the Creative Church

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Tearing the Fabric between ...in this worship packet:

3. A Word about This Packet
4. Theme Interpretation
5. Liturgy for the First Sunday in Advent:
Tearing the Fabric between Dreams and Reality
6. God's Dream, Part 1
7. I Will Hope: *A Litany for the First Sunday in Advent*
8. Where Is God? *A Sermon for the First Sunday in Advent*
11. Tearing the Fabric between... *A Youth Activity*
12. Liturgy for the Second Sunday in Advent:
Tearing the Fabric between War and Peace
13. God's Dream, Part 2
14. Our Lady of Guadalupe
15. Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings
16. Liturgy for the Third Sunday in Advent:
Tearing the Fabric between Sorrow and Joy
17. God's Dream, Part 3
18. When the Threat of Terror and the Prospect of Trust Collide
An Advent Challenge
19. Liturgy for the Fourth Sunday in Advent:
Tearing the Fabric between Fear and Love
20. God's Dream, Part 4
21. Lessons, Carols & Candles for Christmas Eve
Tearing the Fabric between Heaven and Earth
22. Nativity Prayer
23. A Liturgy for Christmas Day
24. A Reading from Baruch
25. A Liturgy for Epiphany
26. Benediction for Epiphany
27. Benediction

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

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A Word about This Packet

With this Advent/Christmastide packet, we begin a new liturgical year, and, for us, a new theme for Year B. The Seeds liturgical team looked at the first scripture passage for this year, Isaiah 64:1-9, and read “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence...” and the discussion exploded from that point.

The vision of tearing open the heavens led to ideas about tearing the fabric between dreams and reality, war and peace, sorrow and joy, fear and love, and, for Christmas, between heaven and earth. The liturgies have followed these concepts.

I don't need to go into more detail about the theme; you can read Alec Ylitalo's interpretation on page 4.

Sally Askins, our resident artist, always manages to come up with stunning images in spite of themes that sometimes evoke scratching of heads instead of visual images. You will see in this packet five new creations of hers, plus a number of her older renderings. We have also included some old favorites by Sharon Rollins, Helen Siegl and Lenora Mathis.

Scott Turner allowed us to print a new block print of Our Lady of Guadalupe, whose Feast Day is December 12, so we included a short piece identifying her and her connection with Mexican peasants. We deliberately chose John Richardson's Rwandan Madonna for the Christmas Day liturgy to draw attention to turmoil all around the world.

You will see many offerings from our liturgical team, which includes Chip Wilson, minister of youth, family and community at Grace Lutheran Church in Peoria, AZ (and also a third-grade teacher at Maryvale Preparatory Acad-

emy); Guilherme Feitosa de Almeida from the Baylor University Department of Theatre Arts; Erin Conaway, pastor of Seventh & James Baptist Church in Waco, TX (which is home to the Seeds office); Ken Sehested, a founding Seeds editor and writer who lives in Ashville, NC; Scott Turner, youth minister at Seventh & James; and Alec Ylitalo, pastor at Richfield Christian Church in Waco. You will sometimes see their names, but their work is everywhere in this packet.

You will find a sermon by Erin Conaway for the first Sunday in Advent, a youth activity suggested by Scott Turner, a challenge from Ken Sehested, and a number of other meditations and prayers. We also included four meditations on God's Dream connected to the four Sundays in Advent.

As usual, Guilherme Almeida carefully chose all of the hymns for the seven liturgies. We hope these musical suggestions, this art and these writings will be inspiring as you create a meaningful Advent and Christmastide season with and for your community. As always, we are deeply grateful for all of you who subscribe to *Sacred Seasons*, and who make use of these gifts in your worship and work. We are 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. May you find resources that will help us guide our congregations into a new year full of hope, peace, joy and love.

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



art by Sally Lynn Askins

Tearing the Fabric between...

A Theme Interpretation

by Alec Ylitalo

There are very few images that someone can mention that you can actually vividly see and hear, and tearing fabric is one of them for me. Just hearing someone say those words, I immediately have the visual and also the loud rip playing on repeat in my mind.

It's a powerful image in and of itself, but what happens when that fabric is the only thing that

We thinly veil the boundaries between many things in the world—and in our own faith even, but in this time of Advent, God begins to tear at those boundaries and helps us to follow suit.

stands between? If you've ever been in a thunderstorm in a tent in the woods, you know that fabric can be the thin boundary that stands in the way of you getting drenched. It's flimsy fabric that, while strong enough to withstand the rain, only takes a small tear to begin the downpour. And then no longer can you tell one side from the other.

We thinly veil the boundaries between many things in the world—and in our own faith even, but in this time of Advent, God begins to tear at those boundaries and helps us to follow suit. That flimsy fabric that humanity has sewn together between Heaven and Earth starts to fray as we wait for the downpour of love to enter the world.

During this season, we hope that you will join us in tearing at the fabric between Dreams and Reality, Fear and Peace, Sorrow and Joy, Fear and Love, and, most importantly, witness God tearing the fabric between Heaven and Earth as the manifestation of love enters the world at Christmas.

Each week, as we move through Advent, I hope that you will be able to vividly hear, see and be a part of tearing the fabric between. Join on the Sunday of Hope, as that small tear starts to make dreams of a just world trickle into reality. Join on

the Sunday of Peace, as that tear grows and the peace of God rains down upon an earth dried up by the trappings of war. Join on the Sunday of Joy, as the Divine flows more swiftly to sweep us away from the sorrow that overwhelms. Join on the Sunday of Love, as perfect love casts out all fear.

Note that the small tear at the fabric between heaven and earth begins with the birth of our Lord, but that tear will only continue to grow as we join Jesus in grabbing at the fabric that is a barrier between and start pulling at it. It begins here at the start of the liturgical year for us, but soon enough we will see a downpour that will inundate the world with the Divine.

May you find inspiration in this packet. May you find ways to tear at the fabric between. May you find where heaven meets earth in this holy and wonderful time of anticipation and expectation. Amen.

—Alec Ylitalo, Senior Minister at Richfield Christian Church in Waco, TX, is a member of the Sacred Seasons liturgical team. He is active in supporting local social assistance programs and in interfaith efforts.



art by Sharon R. Rollins

A Liturgy for the First Sunday in Advent

Tearing the Fabric between Dreams & Reality

by the Seeds Liturgical Team

Call to Worship

Blessed be your name, Beloved, who makes a way out of no way. Draw near unto us, for we live in a season of darkened sun, veiled moon, scattered stars, embattled news. Heaven itself shudders. Our bread is kneaded with sighs, and tears fill our cup. Let the light of your countenance return, with the grain and the grape, communion's feast whereby we remember your purpose, your promise, your provision, and we again rejoice in your illuminating presence and resplendent glory.

—Ken Sehested

Lighting the Candle of Hope

Some days, hope comes easily: staring into the face of an infant when she smiles, seeing two people who have been married for decades hold hands as they shuffle along. Other days, hope feels impossible to find: when the violence on the news overwhelms, or when the bills and collection calls are as unceasing as the dusk. But hope is always intentional. Today, to mark the first day of the Christian year, we hold out hope like a flame in the night and in the wind. We dare to dismantle the walls between our dreams and our daily lives. We get to work once again in the face of overwhelming odds to feed another child, to dress another wound, to confront another system of oppression, to hold the hand of a loved one, to search the skies of our promises for the star that will lead us to you.

—Erin Conaway

Hymn of Peaceful Dreams

"Comfort, Comfort Ye My People"

Celebrating Grace No. 89

Text: Johannes Olearius,

tr. Catherine Winkworth

Music: Genevan Psalter, 1551

PSALM 42, 8.7.8.7.7.8.8.

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Isaiah 64:1-9

Meditation of Preparation

Now, while the night sky is so spectacular, it is a gift of the season to look up and know that we are spirit-freed and unlimited. Not even the immense universe and the glittering stars created for us can compare to the stars in our hearts and what has been prepared for us.

—Joyce Sequichie Hifler, *A Cherokee Feast of Days*



art by Sally Lynn Askins

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

Hymn of Reflection

"O Hear Our Cry, O Lord" (Psalm 80)

Glory to God No. 355

Text: Fred R. Anderson

Music: Richard Wayne Dirksen

VINEYARD HAVEN, Short Meter with Refrain

Reading from the Epistles

I Corinthians 1:3-9

Gospel Reading

Mark 13:24-37

Pastoral Prayer

Offertory

"The King Shall Come When Morning Dawns"

Celebrating Grace No. 97

Text: Ancient Greek Hymn, tr. John Brownlie

Music: Wyeth's Repository of Sacred Music, 1813

MORNING SONG, Common Meter

Sermon

See "Where Is God?" on page 8.

Meditation of Commitment

When we dream alone it remains only a dream. When we dream together, it is not just a dream. It is the beginning of reality.

—Dom Helder Camara

Hymn of Commitment

"In the Bleak Midwinter"

Celebrating Grace No. 131

Text: Christina Rossetti

Music: Gustav Holst

CRANHAM, Irregular Meter

Benediction

Beloved children of God, go from this place filled with the hope and wonder of this season, with your heads and hearts filled with the dream of God, a dream that is born of hope from deep within. Go, holding the dream in your hearts and minds, with the promise to work tirelessly to bring that reality into our world.

God's Dream, Part I

Some dreams float before us like gauzy mists or bright balloons.

But then the mist clears and the balloon floats away or bursts.

Why do we keep dreaming, even though the balloons burst and the mists burn away?

Perhaps it is because the real Dream, the underlying vision, goes before us day after day like a pillar of fire, but it is fire in our bones.

And it doesn't go away. Perhaps we keep dreaming because the Dream itself calls us.

—Katie Cook



art by Sally Lynn Askins

I Will Hope

A Litany

by Rachel C. Hunter

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, God's mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in God."
—Lamentations 1:22-24*

ONE: For the eyes of our children, their energy, laughter, questions, and hugs.

MANY: *I will hope in God.*

ONE: For the work of peace makers everywhere.

MANY: *I will hope in God.*

ONE: We have each other.

MANY: *I will hope in God.*

ONE: For all those who want to share the Earth resources equitably,

for those working for justice,
for environmentalists, for artists,
for workers, teachers, and ministers;
for sunsets and frogs and butterflies;
for great works of literature;
for the extreme power of changing tides;
for philosophers, theologians, and socialist
for peaceable long-haired anarchist
Jesus freaks;

MANY: *I will hope in God.*

ONE: For hippies, poets, and activists;
for those who shout, those who sing,
and those who pray;
for bare feet, for silly moments,
for shared moments, for moments
of tolerance;
for love; for hugs and handshakes
and kisses and backrubs;
for fire and passion;
for a student who stands alone
protesting against paradigms of patriarch

MANY: *I will hope in God.*

ONE: For a little child fearlessly pointing out the emperor's nudity;
for an elder dispatching wisdom of the ages;
for those who bravely work to bring us closer to the realm of God.

MANY: *Therefore I will hope in God.*

ALL: Amen.



art by Sally Lynn Askins

*—at this writing, Rachel (Rae) Hunter was a middle school writing teacher in Richmond, IN.
The above is taken from a longer litany called "Weeping and Hoping."*

Where Is God?

A Sermon for the First Sunday in Advent

by Erin Conaway

Text: Isaiah 64:1-9

They say there are no atheists in foxholes. As far as I could discover, we actually don't know who started saying that. We believe it originated during the Second World War (WWII), but even that is a little sketchy. Its wide use as an aphorism is easily understood. We assume that when the chips are down, when life is on the line, everyone will turn to some higher power for comfort or rescue.

Brian Wansink of Cornell University and Craig Wansink of Virginia Wesleyan College published a study they conducted 50 years after WWII. They built their work off of data collected in the immediate aftermath of the war that found that a soldier's reliance on prayer increased from 32 percent to 74 percent as the fighting intensified. They wanted to know if it lasted over time, if the soldiers continued to turn to prayer in their lives after the bullets and the bombs stopped.

The answer is that it depends: "Those facing heavy combat (versus no combat) attended church 21 percent more often if they claimed their war experience was negative, but those who claimed their experience was positive attended 26 percent

Isaiah knows our history well, and, in this pit of putrid despair, when all seems to be lost, when God is hidden, when the people are broken and disgusting, steeped in sin, Isaiah writes, "Yet..."

less often. The more a veteran disliked the war, the more religious they were 50 years later."

In the paper I read, the writers don't have any theories about this data except that religious involvement seems to be more helpful for veterans who are struggling than it seems to have been for the WWII vets who had a positive experience.

What is it that makes us seek God? One implied assumption behind that question is that God requires some effort to be found. We don't seek things that are readily available; we just use them or know their presence. I don't ever seek air, I just breathe—unless I'm under water and can't get it, then I seek it, and usually with a sense of urgency.

This whole question of where God is and when we decide we want God to be present with us is woven throughout today's Old Testament reading. The prophet begins by begging God to show up. "Tear open the heavens, rend the sky, rip it apart," we say. "Whatever it is that keeps us from seeing you and keeps you from touching us, God, pull it apart and come down." As a part of the cry for help, we read this intimate prayer, thinking about how God used to be near the people. God used to make the mountains tremble and like a raging fire



art by sally Lynn Askins

ignited the kindle and boiled the water. Everyone could hear the crackle and snapping of the wood and the hiss of the dancing water—and everybody knew that God was near. They cry out, “God, you used to do awesome deeds, things we did not expect. You showed up even before we knew to ask you to. But now—well, now you’re gone, and we

In our desperation, we cry through the darkness for you to tear open the heavens and come down. To make your presence known in the places where we cannot feel you.

don’t know where you’ve gone or when or if you will return.”

“Why did God leave?” they say. “Why isn’t God here when the Israelites need God the most?” This part of Isaiah was written during the Exile, when the people were scattered like a lost flock with no shepherd, and the Babylonian wolves were everywhere. This is the moment when they desperately need God to make the mountains tremble and the fires burn.

But all is quiet. So they do what we all do in the void. We try to figure out why God left, why God hasn’t come back. At first, they blame themselves. “You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways, but you were angry and we sinned.” I remember sitting on the couch in my therapist’s office during my first appointment and saying, “Part of what I need to do is figure out what it is about me that made God leave.”

This goes back to the very first Bible story. God goes away, and the man and woman sin. Then God comes back, and they hide themselves. Finally, they are found and God asks why they hid. “Well, we heard you in the garden and we were afraid because we were naked.” God asks, “Who told you you were naked?” We have experiences in life, and we try to interpret them. And when we are trying to live in community, if we start to believe our interpretations are infallible, inerrant, then we get into trouble.

One way I was taught to combat this temptation is to say, “What I made up about this is....” The man and woman discover they are naked and they make up in their minds that God won’t want to be with them or see them, so they hide.

The Israelites decide that God always meets those who gladly do right...but they have sinned, so they think God won’t meet them. Then they quickly blame it on God: “Because you hid yourself, we transgressed.” God, you should know that when you are away, we are going to mess this up. So, really, this is mostly your fault.

The man answers God’s question about eating the fruit by saying, “The woman you gave me....” “I was doing great until you....”

The Israelites say, “What were we supposed to do? Moses stayed up on the mountain forever and we knew you probably destroyed him, so we figured we should make our own way, and Aaron didn’t yell at us when we suggested it, and you are the one who picked him to help Moses.”

Abraham and Sarah say, “What were we supposed to do? You promised us a family and we’re both too old to have babies, so we used Hagar’s body like it was ours to command because you weren’t making it work.”

It is typically a temporary blame we place on God for our sins. Then we just feel gross. Isaiah says,

We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.

“It’s over. You left and we messed up. And now, like a dirty rag with that rancid mildew smell, we know we are repugnant to you.” Or maybe we should say, “What we make up about ourselves in our current state of brokenness is that you must not want to see us. We are naked and disgusting and afraid that if you find us, you’ll turn away and confirm all of our worst fears.”

Our world is a dumpster fire right now. Brutal conflicts rage in Ukraine, in Gaza, and in a hundred other places nobody pays attention to. Millions upon millions of families have been displaced by war. Some of these children have no memories of life before war. Think about that: all they can remember is war. In the midst of this, countries are closing their borders and reducing the number of refugees they will receive.

We are like a filthy rag. People still die every single hour of every single day from hunger—they starve to death or die from hunger-related illness-

es. There are new, almost daily, revelations about sexual misconduct by men in power. We have continued to objectify one another and too often see our sisters or our brothers as bodies to be used to satisfy our desires, rather than what they are: fellow children of God. Of the 30 deadliest shootings in American history, 18 have occurred in the last 10 years. We are naked and disgusting and afraid that



We not only depend on hope in the foxholes of our life, we must practice hope together, even when we think we've got it covered. We continue to pray with the prophet for God to tear apart anything that would come between us, including the very heavens themselves, because we need God to be near.

if God finds us, God will turn away and confirm our worst fears. As we did in the garden when we hid from God, we keep doing it.

But God was looking—in the garden, God was looking and calling for the man and the woman. God waited and, eventually, Sarah became pregnant, even in her old age. After Moses pleaded on behalf of his people, the mind of God was changed, and they continued on their journey. Isaiah knows our history well, and, in this pit of putrid despair, when all seems to be lost, when God is hidden, when the people are broken and disgusting, steeped in sin, Isaiah writes, “Yet...”

Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people.

That is our beam of hope shining into this present darkness. Yet, even so, still, despite all of this mess, O Lord, you are our Creator; we are clay and you are our potter. We are all the work of your hand.

And, in our desperation, we cry through the darkness for you to tear open the heavens and come down. To make your presence known in the places where we cannot feel you. To fill us with your Holy Spirit to the point of overflowing, that we might be the people you are creating us to be, people marked by your image and walking in your grace, offering it to others as it has been offered to us.

This morning, we get a dramatic opening to the new year. We defiantly light a candle of hope in the midst of the darkness to claim our status as God's children, as God's clay, the work of God's hand. This is a beautiful way to frame this new year. In our desperation, we cry out together for God to come near. But what if we're not desperate this morning? Perhaps there are no atheists in foxholes, but there are a bunch of us practical atheists walking around after we climb out.

“Atheist” may be too strong a word, but it can be so easy to lose our desperation for God when things are just average. When there is very little drama in our lives, either high or low, we can so easily slip into a casual disregard for God and simply pass the time until we fall in the hole again, or we crest the mountaintop and are reminded of God's blessings.

That's why we live this cycle, year after year after year after year. It is a part of our faith journey to remember, especially when we don't think we need it. That Hope in God's presence is what sustains us every day—monotonous and dramatic alike. The presence of God keeps us going. We not only depend on hope in the foxholes of our life, we must practice hope together, even when we think we've got it covered. We continue to pray with the prophet for God to tear apart anything that would come between us, including the very heavens themselves, because we need God to be near. We believe in the power of “yet.” And we walk in that hope towards the light that is here and the light that awaits us farther down the road. Amen.

—Erin Conaway, a native of Midland, TX, is a member of the Sacred Seasons liturgical team and a frequent contributor to Seeds publications. He is the pastor of Seventh & James Baptist Church, where the Seeds offices are housed.

Tearing the Fabric between...

A Youth Activity

by Scott Turner

I know this is probably a little different, but the youth group I get to minister to loves to burn things. It's a regular part of our weekly routine. In Sunday school, every Sunday morning, we share prayer requests and celebrations just like every other Sunday school class. Then we write down two prayer requests on little slips of paper from recycled youth activity paper. One is to share, and one is to burn and give to the Lord. I think we have Katie Cook, legendary Seeds editor, to thank for the beautiful practice.

It's a great way to anonymously share a prayer request with the class and also to give something even more private and personal to the Lord. I'd be lying if I said it always made me feel completely comfortable, but it's a great practice that I wouldn't trade for anything. And we are very careful.

Also the youth group is responsible for burning the palm leaves each year for the ashes that we use for Ash Wednesday. That is also another wonderful practice that we have. We even add a few of the ashes from our prayers to the palm ashes.

All this to say, I've done more "burning" in this youth group than I have ever done before, and I've come to believe that other groups (when done carefully and responsibly) could really benefit from a little "spiritual burning."

That brings us to Advent. I was personally arrested by the *Sacred Seasons* packet theme this year. There was something undeniably radical and earth shattering about the ministry of Jesus on earth. So many institutions were broken down or reformed. So many hearts and minds were broken and changed. The earth was changed forever. We were changed forever. How can we not acknowledge how incredible and life-changing it all was?

When I think about it, I think about the things that still need to change today. I think about the institutions that are founded on hate

and greed. I think about the groups that weaponize ignorance and promote violence. I think about all the anger that we carry in this divisive age. How can we make the world right again?

Ultimately, I'm not sure what to do exactly, but I know that the solution to all this will start with Christ. So I think it might be an interesting idea to have a youth bonfire/prayer time. Here in Texas, finding a place for a bonfire is pretty easy, but you might need to be a little more creative.

Gather your group together for a barbeque and enjoy the wonderful winter weather. Spend time together hanging out, play a few games, maybe have a little talent show around a campfire. Do whatever works well with your group. But, at some point, pass around some newspapers. Maybe hand out some magazines or printed out articles. Just have some physical forms of news for your group to explore.

Invite students to find articles that may articulate things that are going wrong in the world. There are wars going on all over. Climate change is displacing human lives. Bigotry and greed exist all over. Invite your students to share what they have found and send it to the Lord in prayer. Pray together and ask for the love of the Lord to fill this broken world.

Don't go overboard. We're not trying to contribute more chemicals to the atmosphere, but I pray that your group can find this practice meaningful.

—Scott Turner was raised in Georgetown, TX, and graduated with a degree in youth ministry from Howard Payne University. At this writing, he is an MDiv student at Truett Theological Seminary and minister to youth at Seventh & James Baptist Church, where the Seeds offices are housed. He serves as a member of the Seeds liturgical team and is passionate about how congregational ministry and art intersect (look for his art in this packet).



A Liturgy for the Second Sunday in Advent

Tearing the Fabric between War & Peace

by the Seeds Liturgical Team

Call to Worship

Blessed be your name, Holy Comforter, who enters every desolation to make straight a highway to Heaven's abode. Command every depth to ascend, every height to plummet, every rough way willed. Bring us again to that encounter with the Baptizer's honey-smearing beard and Jordan's penitential wake. Supple every hardened heart. Relax every clinched hand. Tune our ears to the rustle of

angels' feet hastening to declare glad tidings in a land of fretful recoil.

—Ken Sehested

Lighting the Candle of Peace

These wounds run deep. They are historical and insurmountable. Let this world, wrought with war, begin to see hatred dissolve between enemies as we pray for them—whoever they are—and seek to love them. We light the candle of Peace this morning to calm our anxieties as they pop into our mind, and to light the way to a different world. A world where violence is no longer glorified. Where power is admired in gentleness. Where neighbors in Gaza and Israel defy old stories and break bread together. Where Syrian children think about reading and math and not air-raid drills and chemical weapons. Where first graders in United States trade clear backpacks for bags adorned with cartoons and superheroes. We light the candle of Peace as an act of determination—to make peace on Earth as it is in Heaven.

—Erin Conaway

Hymn of Triumph

"Lo, He Comes with Clouds Descending"

Celebrating Grace No. 100

Text: Charles Wesley, John Cennick

Music: Mark Edwards

WESNATE, 8.7.8.7.8.7.

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Isaiah 40:1-11

Meditation of Preparation

"Peace on earth" in the angelic message does not simply mean peace later—in heaven after this life is over; it does not mean simply peace with God—



art by Sally Lynn Askins

deep down inside your own individual soul. It means rather Pax Christi, the peace of Christ that begins here and now with the poor who have long since buried their hopes. This different peace is the peace that leads the shepherds from hopelessness and fear into a "great joy which will come to all people."

–Dorothee Söelle

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

Hymn of Intercession

"Muéstranos Señor"

(Lord, Let Us See Your Kindness)

Santo, Santo, Santo Hymnal No. 70

Text: Psalm 85:7-13

Music: Ronald F. Krisman

Muéstranos Señor, Irregular Meter

Reading from the Epistles

2 Peter 3:8-15a

Gospel Reading

Mark 1:1-8

Pastoral Prayer

Offertory

"Love Divine, All Love Excelling"

African American Heritage Hymnal

No. 440

Text: Charles Wesley

Music: John Zundel

BEECHER, 8.7.8.7.D.

Sermon

Meditation of Commitment

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

Hymn of Commitment

"There's a Voice in the

Wilderness Crying"

The Hymnal 1982 No. 75

Text: James Lewis Milligan

Music: Henry Hugh Bancroft
ASCENSION, Irregular Meter

Benediction

Beloved children of God, go from this place with the peace of Christ in your hearts and minds. Go into a world that is warring with itself and bring that peace to your neighbors and your enemies. With God's help, may we rip the fabric between war and peace with acts of mercy.



art by Sally Lynn Askins

God's Dream, Part 2

Sometimes we can see and feel the Dream;
it feels right and good
and we can see the City of God.
There is a lurch in our hearts,
a holy light in our faces.
But sometimes the feelings are stale
and our vision is dim.
Sometimes we act the part
when we feel dead inside.
But always the Dream is real.

Advent is a time when all of us
try a little harder
to see the Holy City,
to catch a glimpse of the Dream.
–Katie Cook

Our Lady of Guadalupe

Patron of Indigenous Peoples & Migrants

One tradition that occurs during Advent may escape the notice of many, and yet it is of supreme importance to many others. The Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe falls on December 12. She is said to have appeared—as an apparition of Mary, the mother of Jesus—to two Mexican peasants in December 1531.

She is said to have appeared four times to Juan Diego, a member of the Indigenous Chichimec tribal community, and to his uncle, Juan Bernardino. Her shrine, the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City, is the most visited Catholic shrine in the world and, according to *Travel and Leisure* magazine, the world's third most visited sacred site.

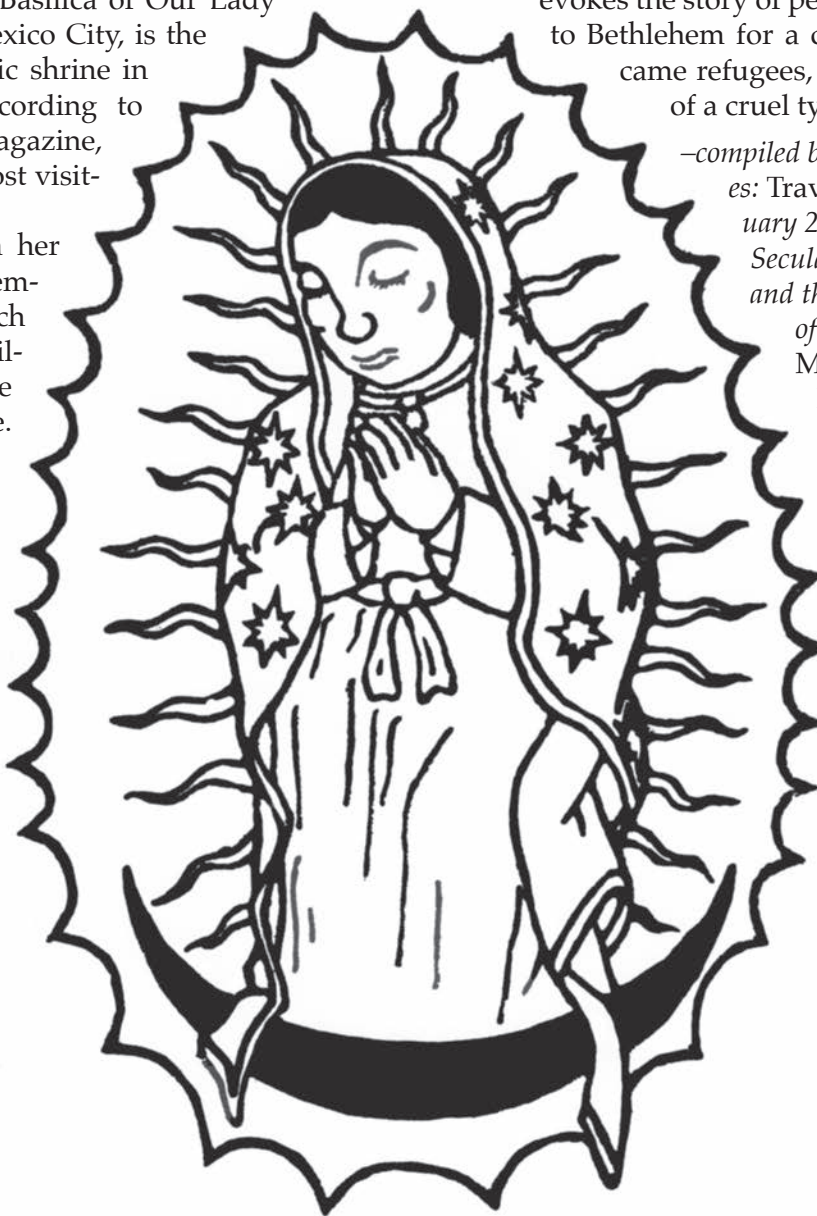
In keeping with her Feast Day, on December 11 and 12 each year, millions of pilgrims flock to the Mexico City shrine. The festival is marked by dances, fireworks and parades representing the diverse populations of Mexico. She holds many patronages, including the country of Mexico and, according to some faith traditions, the Americas.

She is venerated as a crusader for social justice, especially among Indigenous Mexican peoples and Native Americans. Leaders of the Mexican revolution of the early 20th century rallied people under her banner, as did César Chávez and the United Farm Workers of the 1960s in the US. In more contemporary times, her image is invoked by advocates of immigrants.

Our own Scott Turner created the block print below, depicting the lady who so poignantly evokes the story of peasants who traveled to Bethlehem for a census and then became refugees, fleeing the violence of a cruel tyrant.

—compiled by Katie Cook. Sources: *Travel and Leisure*, January 2012; “Holy Activist, Secular Saint: Religion and the Social Activism of César Chávez,” Mexican American Religions, Duke University Press, 2008; Galvez, *Allyshia*. 2010. Guadalupe in New York: Devotion and the Struggle for Citizenship Rights Among Mexican Immigrants, New York University Press.

Art by Scott Turner.



Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings

While you walk along your ways,
Waiting, we bedeck ourselves:
We prepare the house,
We throw open the shutters,
We anticipate your arrival.
You sweep away our weariness,
Making your dwelling in us.
In you, we live again; in you, we are reborn—
In this heedless dawn.

—Jaci Maraschin, translated from the Portuguese
by Guilherme Almeida and Anita Scotti

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

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

As we journey week by week through Advent, we come to the realization that we could never find our way to hope, peace or joy without love. Love opens our minds and hearts to all that is holy and shows us who we are meant to be. In her book *Opening to Miracles*, Betty Clare Moffatt writes, “Practicing the

presence of love changes your perceptions. And changing your perceptions creates miracles around you.” Love has never been more *present* than in the birth of Jesus. Love made flesh, swaddled, and placed in our arms. To this world fractured by fear and hate and greed and despair, the Creator responds, not with punishment or judgment, but with love. Love is born, and when we are graced to love, we are born anew.

—Deborah E. Harris



art by Helen Siegl

Give us, O God,
the vision which can see
Your love in the world in spite
of human failure.
Give us the faith to trust
Your goodness
in spite of our ignorance and weakness.

Give us the knowledge
that we may continue
to pray with understanding hearts.
And show us what
each one of us can do
to set forward the coming
of the day of universal peace.

—Frank Borman, *Apollo 8 space mission*,
Christmas Eve 1968

A Liturgy for the Third Sunday in Advent

Tearing the Fabric between Sorrow & Joy

by the Seeds Liturgical Team

Call to Worship

Blessed are you, Anointed One, maker of gladness in a season of gloom, release to every captive, defender of the desperate, drier of every tear. Renew the barren land with your streams of pardon. May every sorrowed voice be turned again to joyful exultation. May the sound of Mother Mary's Magnificat echo the shout of praise that lifts the indigent and subverts the builders of endless barns. Strengthen our weak knees, and still our restless hands. Unleash speech in the silenced and restore sight for the obscured. Let the hills break forth in song, the trees in applause.

—Ken Sehested

Lighting the Candle of Joy

Touching a flame to the wick of joy, we bring all of our celebrations and the Ebenezers of glad moments into this sacred space. Birthday candles, anniversary candles, wedding cake toppers and romantic dinners inform the light of this morning. We remember with grief other moments and light the candle of joy to honor that pain and celebrate the wonder of life together. This light holds them all in mesmerizing flickers of healing as the distance between sorrow and joy shrinks to the width of the flame. We give thanks not for the absence of pain, but for the fullness of real joy large enough to hold it all.

—Erin Conaway

Hymn of Adoration

"Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence"

Chalice Hymnal No. 124

Text: Liturgy of St. James, tr. Gerard Moultrie

Music: French Carol

PICARDY, 8.7.8.7.8.7.

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Isaiah 61:1-4; 8-11

Meditation of Preparation

The Hebrew prophets invited God's people to celebrate even when things were at their worst. Six hundred years before the first Christmas, Israel was in terrible shape. Assyria, the latest in a long line of superpowers, was threatening. The prophet Zephaniah (3:14-20) pointed out how bad things were. He criticized their religious foolishness, hypocritical leaders, and the way they ignored God. Zephaniah wrote, "The people will soon walk like the blind and their blood will be poured out like the dust." That's not much to sing about, and yet the prophet finds hope. He concludes his book

art by Sally Lynn Askins



with this glorious song, this call to celebrate God's presence: "Come, worship, sing, shout, rejoice with all your heart. For no matter what comes, God is with you. God sings and dances. God celebrates the poor being loved, the outcasts being welcomed, and the journey home that we all share."

–Brett Younger, "Joy for Everyone"

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 126

Hymn of Liberation

"Come, O Long-Expected Jesus"

Chalice Hymnal No. 125

Text: Charles Wesley

Music: Rowland H. Prichard

HYFRYDOL, 8.7.8.7.D.

Reading from the Epistles

I Thessalonians 5:16-24

Gospel Reading

John 1:6-8, 19-28

Pastoral Prayer

Offertory

"Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming"

Lift Up Your Hearts No. 79

Text: German Carol

Music: Alte Catholische Geistliche Kirchengesäng

ES IST EIN' ROS' ENTSPRUNGEN,
7.6.7.6.6.7.6.

Sermon

Meditation of Commitment

It's easy to forget that Christmas is not a party for those who smile the most. This season isn't for people who've never learned that life is hard. Christmas is for those who've known tragedy and discovered that sadness isn't the final word. Wendell Berry writes, "Be joyful, even though you have considered all the facts."

–Brett Younger, "Joy for Everyone"

Hymn of Commitment

"God Be in My Head"

The Hymnal 1982 No. 694

Text: Sarum Primer

Music: Sydney Hugo Nicholson

LYTLINGTON, Irregular Meter

Benediction

Beloved children of God, go from this place filled with joy, even in the knowledge that all is not yet well. Go out and share your joy with a world that is bathed in sorrow, and may God give us all strength and grace as we go.

God's Dream, Part 3

Sometimes the Dream comes to us
Like the mystic discernments of the saints
when they could see the Holy City;
like the perception of Don Quixote
when he saw nobility and beauty
where others saw squalor.
Sometimes we catch a whispered hint,
a momentary sign,
a rumor of glory.
Sometimes we see beyond our enlightened fatalism
and our vogueish cynicism
into the true longings of our hearts,
into the Eden that we forgot,
into the why-not that frees our souls.
They, whoever "they" are,
all think we're crazy,
but we don't care.
–Katie Cook



art by Sally Lynn Askins

When the Threat of Terror & the Prospect of Trust Collide

An Advent Challenge

by Ken Sehested

Advent is the Christian season when the threat of terror and the prospect of trust collide, both competing for our attention regarding prospects for the future. Will it be more of the same, only intensified?

In all times and places the dominant cultural voices (secular and religious) have denied that history will ever break free of its orbit of pain, suffer-

Advent is the invitation to attentiveness even when the sap isn't running, in the face of a howling cold wind and the frightful dark night.

ing and loss—as if history has its own unbreakable sway of gravity. They are called the “realists,” and they champion charity to suppress the demands of justice. Though the church will occasionally read the Beatitudes in public, few put much stock in such a future.

There's no better summary of such popular wisdom than by the cheeky comment of Countess Violet Crawly (played by Maggie Smith) in the television show *Downton Abby*. “Hope,” the Countess insisted, “is a tease to keep us from accepting reality.”

Famously, the Apostle Paul confronted what the realists called “foolishness” with his affirmation that God's foolishness can be trusted. According to him (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:18-30), the Gospel announcement is that another world is not only possible but is in fact on its way—present already in those with open rather than grasping hands—as the aperitif of an era beyond scorched time.

In Latin, there are two words for the future. *Futurus* suggests a future constructed out of the past and present.

Futurologists are those who rely on extrapolations from present trends, indicators that lean toward sustaining present patterns of power and suppressing alternative visions.

The word *adventus*, on the other hand, suggests the arrival of the new. Certainly for Christians, the season of Advent brings us to the edge of our chairs, straining for the sound of the announcement of annulment for earth's agony. This waiting and watching is neither neutral nor passive. It is sustained by a bias—one that governing authorities fear.

Advent is the seasonal marking of *adventus* faith, formed by the beatific vision of a future beyond all currently available calculations, one that can be received only by those with unclenched fists and unclasped hearts, one that does not obliterate creatureliness but arises from its compost.

The stories we tell and songs we sing in our sanctuaries remind us that buoyancy emerges from unseen places, at unknowing moments, in unpredictable ways, beyond present reckoning and prognostication.

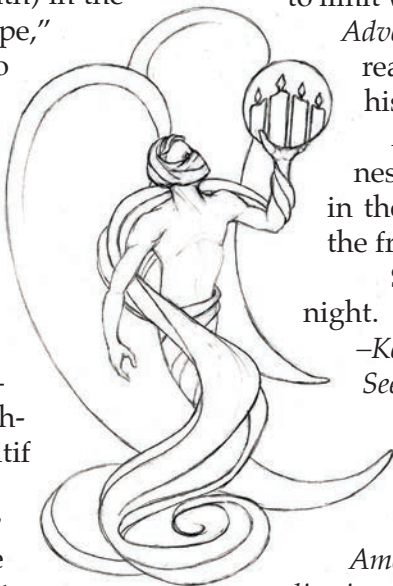
The present world's *futurus* rulers always want to limit what is possible to what is available.

Adventus people instinctively know that reality will not be bridled by apparent history and its imperial champions.

Advent is the invitation to attentiveness even when the sap isn't running, in the face of a howling cold wind and the frightful dark night.

So, kindred, *carpe noctem*—sieve the night.

—Ken Sehested was one of the founding *Seeds* editors in Decatur, GA. A member of the *Seeds* Board of Advisors and the Sacred Seasons liturgical team, he was also the founding director of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America and is now the curator for the online journal *Prayer&Politiks*.



art by Sally Lynn Askins

A Liturgy for the Fourth Sunday in Advent

Tearing the Fabric between Fear and Love

by the Seeds Liturgical Team

Call to Worship

Blessed be your name, Mighty One, whose light is promised only to those who sit in darkness, whose providence rests among the humiliated, whose promise breaks forth from history's shambles and every dispirited corner, announcing deliverance to the least, the lost, the disappeared; and threat to gangsters, banksters, and all who barter justice to the highest bidder. Fear not, the season of fraud shall be eclipsed by Glad Tidings of earth's reclamation amid Heaven's rejoicing.

—Ken Sehested

Lighting the Candle of Love

Perfect love casts out fear. Like shadows disappearing as the match flashes hot and bright, our fears race away when we get in touch with the depth of God's love. We light the candle of love this morning and gaze into the beauty of hearts combining. Children playing together, superceding anything that would separate them, a kiss on the top of your head conveying the blessing, the friend who knows your crushed dreams and your wild success and loves you anyway, the grace of being needed. We know love through so many different expressions and gestures. May the light of love illumine our words, ignite our smiles, blaze in our laughter, and rage in our commitment to be siblings to one another.

—Erin Conaway

Hymn of Hope

"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

Glory to God No. 88

Text and Music: Latin Hymn

VENI EMMANUEL, Long Meter with Refrain

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

Meditation of Preparation

The Advent of Jesus is the astounding claim that love is the only way to relate—to anyone. The Advent of Jesus is God's emphatic reaffirmation that love is the way God chooses to relate to each of us.

—John S. Ballenger, "Love: A Meditation"

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26

Hymn of Gratitude

"Born of God, Eternal Savior"

The New Century Hymnal No. 542



art by Sally Lynn Askins

Text: Somerset T. C. Lowry
Music: Tochter Sion
WEISSE FLAGGEN, 8.7.8.7.D.

Reading from the Epistles
Romans 16:25-27

First Gospel Reading
Luke 1:26-38

Second Gospel Reading
Luke 1:46b-55

Pastoral Prayer

Offertory

“While Shepherds Watched
Their Flocks”

Chalice Hymnal No. 154

Text: Nahum Tate

Music: George Frederick Handel
CHRISTMAS, Common Meter

Sermon

Meditation of Commitment

For us, too, the angel comes—
tonight, and tomorrow, and the
next day. And he says, “You have
been chosen to bear this child,
this word-become-flesh, this God-
with-us. A special task has been
appointed to you.” And we, each
of us, will say, tonight, tomorrow,
and the next day, “My soul mag-
nifies the Lord,” or we will turn
away and leave the Child in the
cold.

–Katie Cook, “Advent Promise”

Hymn of Commitment

“Not the Powerful, Not
the Privileged”

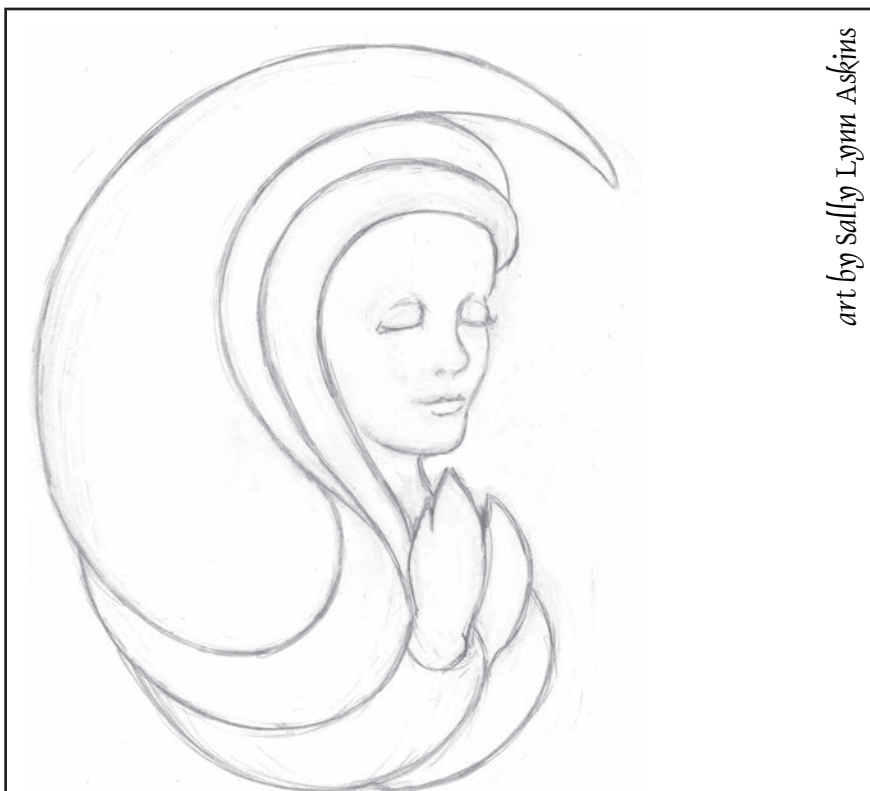
Together in Song No. 288

Text and Music: John L. Bell
PEDIGREE, 8.7.8.7.

Benediction

Beloved children of God, go
from this place with your fears
quenched by the love of God. Go,

fully clothed in the love that only God can give.
Love your neighbors without exception. Dare
even to try to love your enemies.



art by Sally Lynn Askins

God's Dream, Part 4

We once dreamed of mistletoe
and sugarplum fairies,
But now our dreams are different.
We dream now of a commonwealth...
where hands of different colors
and hearts of different persuasions
join freely
without frowns from anyone,
where no one bedfast goes unattended;
no one heartsick goes uncomforted;
no one lonely goes unvisited;
no one hungry goes unfed;
where nations work together (gasp!)
for peace and good;
where the wealthy share their bounty
joyfully;
Where love really does rule all.
Listen now for the Dream.
Listen as though your life depended on it.
Because it does.
–Katie Cook

Lessons, Carols & Candles for Christmas Eve

Tearing the Fabric between Heaven & Earth

by the Seeds Liturgical Team

Call to Worship

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

Opening Carol

“Good Christians All, Rejoice and Sing!”
Glory to God No. 239
Text: Cyril A. Alington
Music: Melchior Vulpus
GELOBT SEI GOTT, 8.8.8. with alleluias

First Reading

Isaiah 9:2-7

Lighting the Candle of Hope

Second Carol

“It Came Upon the Midnight Clear”
Chalice Hymnal No. 153
Text: Edmund H. Sears
Music: Richard S. Willis
CAROL, Common Meter Double

Second Reading

Isaiah 65:17-25

Lighting the Candle of Peace

Third Carol

“Sing We Now of Christmas”
The Celebration Hymnal No. 275
Text: Tom Fettke
Music: French Carol
FRENCH CAROL, 11.11.10.11.

Third Reading

Psalm 96

Lighting the Candle of Joy

Fourth Carol

“Joy to the World”
Baptist Hymnal 1991 No. 87
Text: Isaac Watts
Music: George Frederick Handel
ANTIOCH, Common Meter with repeats



art by Sally Lynn Askins

Fourth Reading
John 1:1-14

*Lighting the Candle
of Love*

Fifth Carol
"Wake, Awake, for Night
is Flying"
Worship and Rejoice
No. 164

Text: Philipp Nicolai,
tr. Catherine Winkworth
Music: Philipp Nicolai,
adapt. J. S. Bach
WACHET AUF, Irregular Me-
ter

Fifth Reading
Luke 2:1-20

*Lighting the Christ
Candle*

We cry out with the prophet Isaiah for you to tear open the heavens and anything else that would separate us from you. Tear down the walls we build; tear off the figs behind which we hide; pull to pieces the pride that would keep us from you. And you do. You came to us this holy night, became one of us, and forever ripped the veil that would make you seem forbidden. You light the world, and we light this candle with reverence and awe, with tears of joy and acceptance, a small flame representing the warmth of your Incarnation among us. Shine in our hearts and blur the lines between heaven and earth. And, in your grace, let us help.
—Erin Conaway

Benediction
See "Nativity Prayer" on this page.

Nativity Prayer

by Erin Conaway



art by Helen Siegl

Holy, infant God...

We, like your blessed parents, have been on a journey to arrive at this moment. We have been waiting and lighting candles of anticipation in our hearts and in our sanctuary, hoping beyond hope, searching for signs of peace, seeking to find joy in the midst of darkness, and feeling the warm embrace of love wrapped firmly around our insecurities and fears.

Tonight, this holy night, we, like your blessed parents, want to be close to you...we want to stare at your miraculous face as we see it reflected in creation all around us: the crisp breeze in the air, the animals scurrying about making preparations for winter, the silent strength of the stars shining so brilliantly in the clear night sky, the fallen leaves in their motley wonder.

We want to stare at your miraculous face as we see it reflected in the comfort of family found in this place—and in the faces of our neighbors whom we encounter sleeping on the street, serving in restaurants and bars, making the cars we drive and the clothes we wear, working long nights in hospitals and warehouses, teaching and caring for our children and grandchildren, harvesting crops, in the faces of those waiting and hoping for work.

We want to stare at your miraculous face in the silence of the night—the night that occurred so very long ago, and this night that is occurring as we pray. Give us eyes to see your glory, revealed to us in unexpected ways.

Transform us into faithful followers as we take another step in the direction of the star. Hear our praise and accept our meager offerings, and may the playing of our drums echo their melodious song through the gates of heaven.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for the humility of your incarnation, for the utter love of your presence among us and for the grace of our salvation. We pray these things in the strength of your name, in the hope of your faith, bathed in deep joy, filled with love and clinging to your peace. Amen.

—Erin Conaway is the pastor of Seventh & James Baptist Church in Waco, TX, where the Seeds ministry is housed.

A Liturgy for Christmas Day

by the Seeds Liturgical Team

Call to Worship

Blessed be your name, Mystery of the Ages, smuggled into a backwater province of imperial vanity, incarnating history in the womb of a peasant, threat to each lordly regent and every claim of privilege, star-guiding those considered alien to the Covenant's boundary, announcing Heaven's alert to lowborn hirelings, reversing antiquity's logic of predestined rule. Grant us the power of assent to Mary's rebellious submission.

—Ken Sehested

Lighting of the Advent wreath

A Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Isaiah 52:7-10

Meditation of Preparation

It took real courage to be at the manger: Mary's courage, Joseph's commitment to Mary, the awe-struck obedience of the shepherds, and the politically threatening courage of the Magi to rebuke Herod. The gift of God's son to a hostile and dangerous world is a story full of risk and adventurous obedience. Lives were radically altered. Don't be deceived by 21st-century consumerism, "happy holidays" greetings, or the dumbing-down of "Merry Christmas." Emmanuel—God with us—is a powerful reality.

—Phil Strickland

A Reading from the Psalms

Psalms 98

First Carol

"Creation Sings a New Song unto the Lord"

Together in Song No. 166

Text: James Philip McAuley

Music: Richard Connolly

COSMIC PRAISE, 10.10.10.9. with refrain

Reading from the Epistles

Hebrews 1:1-4 (5-12)

Second Carol

"Jesus Has come, and Brings Joy as Our Savior"

Together in Song No. 208

Text: Johann Ludwig Konrad Allendorf

Music: Köthen Geistliches Lieder

JESUS IST KOMMEN, 11.10.11.10.11.11.

Gospel Reading

John 1:1-14

Pastoral Prayer

Offertory

"On Christmas Night All Christians Sing"

Worship and Rejoice No. 222



art by John Richardson

Text and Music: English Carol,
harm. Ralph Vaughan Williams
SUSSEX CAROL, 8.8.8.8.8.8.

Sermon

Christmas Meditation

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*

Third Carol

“O Gladsome Light, O Grace”

The Hymnal 1982 No. 36

Text: Greek Liturgy,

tr. Robert Seymour Bridges

Music: Louis Bourgeois,

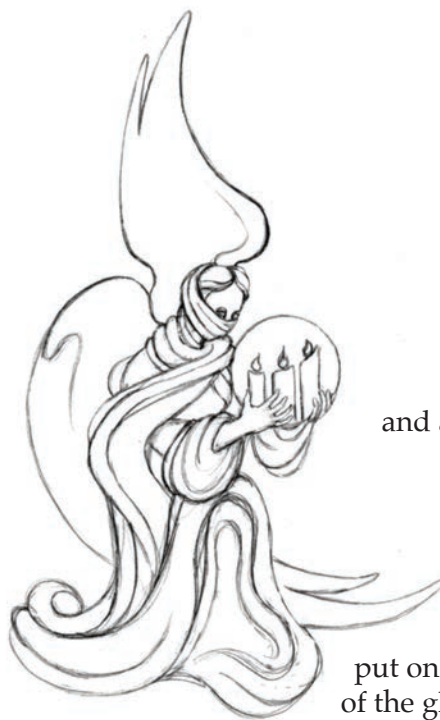
harm. Claude Goudimel

LE CANTIQUE DE SIMÉON,

6.6.7.6.6.7.

Christmas Benediction

Beloved children of God, go now from this place and, as Mary did, ponder all the things that you have heard and seen. For this day and the days to come, allow the hope, peace, joy and love of God to come through the torn fabric of the heavens and dwell in your hearts.



Take off the garment
of your sorrow
and affliction, O Jerusalem,
and put on forever
the beauty of
the glory from God.

Put on the robe
of the righteousness
that comes from God;
put on your head the diadem
of the glory of the Everlasting;
for God will show your splendor
everywhere under heaven.

For God will give you evermore the name,
“Righteous Peace, Godly Glory.”

Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height;
look toward the east,
and see your children gathered
from west and east
at the word of the Holy One,
rejoicing that God has remembered them.

For they went off from you on foot,
led away by their enemies;
but God will bring them back to you,
carried in glory, as on a royal throne.

For God has ordered that every high
mountain and the everlasting
hills be made low
and the valleys filled up,
to make level ground
so that Israel may walk safely
in the glory of God.

The woods and every fragrant tree
have shaded you at God’s command.

For God will lead you with joy,
in the light of God’s glory
with the mercy and righteousness
that come from God.

–from Baruch 5:1-9

art by Sally Lynn Askins

A Liturgy for Epiphany

by the Seeds Liturgical Team

art by Sally Lynn Askins



Call to Worship

Blessed be your name, O Ancient of Days, brooder over Creation's bud, blossomed in delight, enduring history's blight, reaching into the cosmos to anoint a star of brilliant light to alert supplicants in distant land, beyond Sinai's boundary and Hebrew lineage, to bear witness to the Promised One of God's favor and threat to Herod's imperial sway. We give thanks for the Magi of every age who transgress the borders of tribe and clan, the barriers of every imperious claim to divine fame and favor. May Mary's welcome be our own.

—Ken Sehested

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Isaiah 60:1-6

Meditation of Preparation

"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

Hymn of Blessed Community

"As with Gladness Sages Bold"

Chalice Hymnal No. 173

Text: William Chatterton Dix

Music: Conrad Kocher

DIX, 7.7.7.7.7.

A Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14

Reading from the Epistles

Ephesians 3:1-12

Hymn of Adoration

"What Child Is This, Who, Laid to Rest"

The Hymnal 1982 No. 115

Text: William Chatterton Dix

Music: English Melody

GREENSLEEVES, 8.7.8.7. with refrain

Gospel Reading

Matthew 2:1-12

Pastoral Prayer

Offertory

"Brightest and Best"

Chalice Hymnal No. 174
Text: Reginald Heber
Music: Southern Harmony, 1835
STAR IN THE EAST, 11.10.11.10.D.

Sermon

Meditation of Commitment

Where, indeed, should your Light have shown except upon those who sit in darkness?
—from an Orthodox chant

Hymn of Commitment

“Fill Thou My Life, O Lord, My God”
Lift Up Your Hearts No. 356
Text: Horatius Bonar
Music: Gesangbuch der Herzog
ELLACOMBE, 7.6.7.6.D.

Benediction

See “Benediction for Epiphany” on this page.

art by Lenora Mathis



Benediction for Epiphany

Let us go in peace now;
For our eyes have seen God’s salvation.
We have stood, dumbstruck,
before the manger.
We have exchanged glances with the shepherds
and looked, sheepishly, out of the corners of our eyes
at the wise men.
We have listened, with terror and delight,
to the messengers with their extraterrestrial song.
We, who have walked so often and so long
in terrible darkness,
have been flooded with holy light.

Let us go in peace now;
We have brought our gifts to the manger—
and for some of us it was merely our broken selves—
but now, like the shepherds,
we must go back to our fields;
like the magi,
we must go home another way.

Let us go in peace now;
May this Holy Child guide our steps
into the new year,
And give us the courage
to give birth to God’s realm.
—Katie Cook

In the Coming Days...

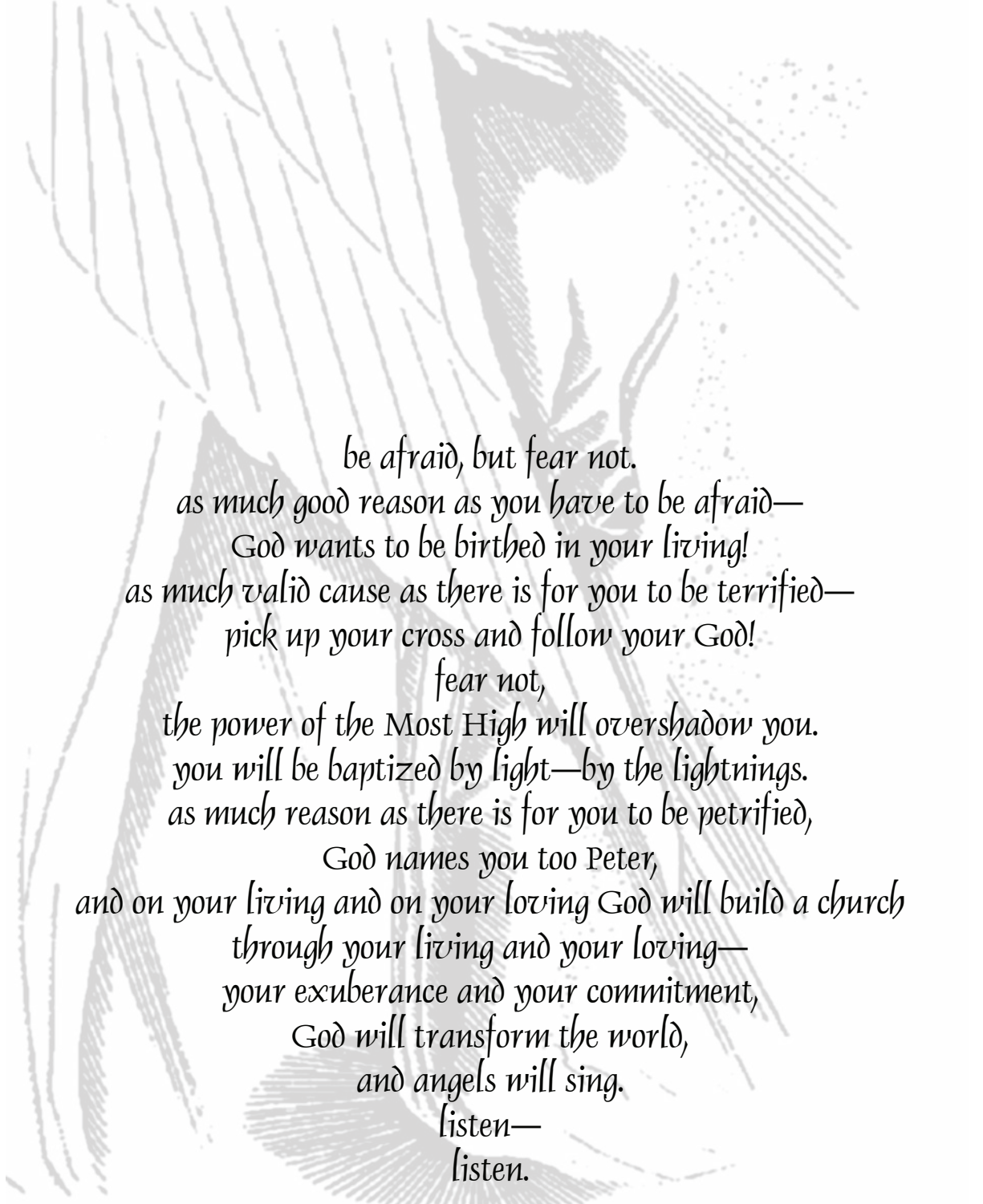
Perhaps this Christmas season you listened to the very old text from Isaiah lyricized by Handel, “To us a child is born.” (Isaiah 9:6) I did. Well, now that all the gifts are open, do pause to consider the miracle of God’s imagination, which sends a savior into the world by way of a homeless family, a truth-teller who shatters the cultural system of lies that enclose people with injustice, a child who grows up to live for others all the way to the cross.

—Harld J. Recinos, *Perkins School of Theology* (from “What Child is This? And What Does He Ask of Us?” in the *Dallas Morning News*, December 25, 2005)

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, Minnesota*

Benediction



*be afraid, but fear not.
as much good reason as you have to be afraid—
God wants to be birthed in your living!
as much valid cause as there is for you to be terrified—
pick up your cross and follow your God!
fear not,
the power of the Most High will overshadow you.
you will be baptized by light—by the lightnings.
as much reason as there is for you to be petrified,
God names you too Peter,
and on your living and on your loving God will build a church
through your living and your loving—
your exuberance and your commitment,
God will transform the world,
and angels will sing.
listen—
listen.*

—John Ballenger

—John Ballenger is pastor of Woodbrook Baptist Church in Towson, MD, in the Baltimore area. He served as the Seeds poetry and drama editor for many years. The art on this page was found on an old worship guide at Seventh & James Baptist Church.