

The Word Became Flesh

A devotional guide for Advent 2001 through the Feast of the Epiphany 2002 in the form of a commonplace book for the family and friends of St. James United Presbyterian Church.



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The First Sunday in Advent

Isaiah 2:1-5

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!

New Revised Standard Version

Psalm 122

I was glad when they said to me,
"Let us go to the house of the LORD!"

Our feet are standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem.

Jerusalem built as a city
that is bound firmly together.

To it the tribes go up,
the tribes of the LORD,
as was decreed for Israel,
to give thanks to the name of the LORD.

For there the thrones for judgment were set up,
the thrones of the house of David.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
"May they prosper who love you.

Peace be within your walls,
and security within your towers."

For the sake of my relatives and friends
I will say, "Peace be within you."

For the sake of the house of the LORD our God,
I will seek your good.

New Revised Standard Version

Romans 13:11-14

Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers;

the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

New Revised Standard Version

Matthew 24:36-44

“But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

New Revised Standard Version

Collect for the First Sunday in Advent

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. *Amen.*

Book of Common Prayer (1549)

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

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

Refrain Rejoice! Rejoice!

Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Wisdom from on high,
 Who orderest all things mightily;
 To us the path of knowledge show,
 And teach us in her ways to go.

Refrain

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O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save,
And give them victory over the grave.

Refrain

O come, Thou Day-spring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.

Refrain

O come, Thou Key of David, come,
And open wide our heavenly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.

Refrain

O come, O come, great Lord of might,
Who to Thy tribes on Sinai's height
In ancient times once gave the law
In cloud and majesty and awe.

Refrain

O come, Thou Root of Jesse's tree,
An ensign of Thy people be;
Before Thee rulers silent fall;
All peoples on Thy mercy call.

Refrain

O come, Desire of nations, bind
In one the hearts of all mankind;
Bid Thou our sad divisions cease,
And be Thyself our King of Peace.

Refrain

Unknown , 9th Century
translated by John M. Neale in *Mediaeval Hymns*, 1851.

Spirituality and Food

The Christian life is more than words, rituals, and ideas. It is about the visceral sensation of relatedness and belonging. The smell of candles, crayons, and the taste of cookies and Kool-Aid are a part of my spirituality as much as the writings of any theologian. Most of us learned the comfort and celebration of food long before we learned our own names. The tastes and smells of holidays are integral to our understanding of who we are and to our welcoming and being welcomed into community. When the Psalmist says to “taste and see that the LORD is good,” it is more than a figure of speech. Taste, smell, and touch are integral to our understanding of sacraments being physical carriers of spiritual grace. They are also integral to our celebration of the yearly cycles of our faith.

Stu Smith

Sugar Cookies

1 ½ cups sifted confectioners' sugar	½ teaspoon almond flavoring
1 cup butter	2 ½ cups flour
1 egg	1 teaspoon soda
1 teaspoon vanilla	1 teaspoon cream of tartar

Cream sugar and butter. Mix in egg and flavorings. Measure flour by dip-level-pour method or by sifting. Blend dry ingredients; stir in. Refrigerate 2 to 3 hours. Heat oven to 375°. Divide dough in half and roll out on lightly floured pastry cloth to 3/16 inch thick. Cut with a cookie cutter dipping the cutter in flour then shaking off the excess flour between each cookie. Sprinkle with sugar. Place on a lightly greased baking sheet. Bake 7 to 8 minutes or until delicately golden. Makes 5 dozen 2 to 2 ½ inch cookies.

Charlotte Whitley

Advent Haiku

Festive Advent wreath,
you decorate our table
while we wait to eat.

Phil Gilman
Presbyterian Poet
Used with permission.

Rosettes

Rosettes are some of my favorite cookies to make at Christmas. I make this recipe to share with relatives and at a St. James coffee hour.

Patty Shell Mold	½ teaspoon salt
1 ½ lb shortening heated to 365°	1-3 tablespoons sugar
1 cup flour (sifted)	1 egg beaten
1 cup milk	

Mix ingredients until smooth. Dip mold in butter (do not cover) shake off mold into hot grease. Usually you can cook 3 or 4 at a time cook until golden brown remove and place on a paper towel. When cool cover each rosette with confectioners' sugar. Makes about 4 dozen.

Betty McCoy

Thief of Hearts

Strange, Jesus,
how you liken your returning
to a burglary
and warn us: keep awake.

But we sleep
anyway,
our minds unlit,
our hearts for once
defenseless,

broken
into easily,
stolen
at your unexpected hour.

Strange, your love,
despite our broken vigils.

You wait
until our steeled hearts
are softened in the dark.

And then you steal in: Amen.

Rachel Srubas
Poet and Presbyterian Minister
Used with permission.

The Second Sunday in Advent

Isaiah 11:1-10

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins. The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

New Revised Standard Version

Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19

Give the king your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to a king's son.

May he judge your people with righteousness,
and your poor with justice.

May the mountains yield prosperity for the people,
and the hills, in righteousness.

May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,
give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor.

May he live while the sun endures,
and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.

May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass,
like showers that water the earth.

his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound,
until the moon is no more.

Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
who alone does wondrous things.

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Blessed be his glorious name forever;
may his glory fill the whole earth. Amen and Amen.

New Revised Standard Version

Romans 15:4-13

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name"; and again he says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people"; and again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him"; and again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope." May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

New Revised Standard Version

Matthew 3:1-12

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

New Revised Standard Version

Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant us that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Book of Common Prayer (1549)

Savior of the Nations, Come

Savior of the nations, come;
Virgin's Son, here make Thy home!
Marvel now, O heaven and earth,
That the Lord chose such a birth.

Not by human flesh and blood;
By the Spirit of our God
Was the Word of God made flesh,
Woman's offspring, pure and fresh.

Wondrous birth! O wondrous Child
Of the virgin undefiled!
Though by all the world disowned,
Still to be in heaven enthroned.

From the Father forth He came
And returneth to the same,
Captive leading death and hell
High the song of triumph swell!

Thou, the Father's only Son,
Hast over sin the victory won.
Boundless shall Thy kingdom be;
When shall we its glories see?

Brightly doth Thy manger shine,
Glorious is its light divine.
Let not sin overcloud this light;
Ever be our faith thus bright.

Praise to God the Father sing,
Praise to God the Son, our King,
Praise to God the Spirit be
Ever and eternally.

Ambrose of Milan, *circa* 397;
translated from Latin to German by Martin Luther, 1523;
translated from German to English by William M. Reynolds, 1851.

Crescent Cookies

1/2 lb. (2 sticks) butter	2 cups sifted flour
1/2 cup confectioners sugar	1 cup finely chopped pecans
1 teaspoon vanilla extract	confectioners sugar

Cream butter with an electric mixer; add sugar and beat until blended. Add vanilla, flour, then nuts; mix well. Chill; shape generous tablespoons of dough into crescents. Bake at 350° F. on ungreased cookie sheets about 20 minutes. As soon as crescents are removed from the oven, roll them in confectioners sugar.

Joan Bucke

Incomplete Recipe--Treasured Memories

I have happy memories of helping my grandmother make her special Christmas cookies. My job was to cut them out from the rolled thin dough using cookie cutters with fancy shapes, then to sprinkle sugar on the tops before they went into the oven for baking. Unfortunately when I looked for the recipe in my grandmother's cookbook this was all I found.

Butter cookies

1lb. butter	8 tablespoons wine
1 ½ cups sugar	1 quart flour

“These are the good butter cookies, the ones we always make.”

There were no instructions on how to mix ingredients, how long to bake or any other useful information. But when I remember how deliciously crisp and rich they were I'm almost tempted just to mix everything together, roll out the dough thin and hope they might taste a little like the ones grandma made.

Elsie Lockwood

Cinnamon Cookies

(Delicious and with complete instructions)

2 ¾ cups sifted flour	1 cup butter or margarine
2 teaspoons cream of tartar	1 ½ cup sugar
1 teaspoon soda	2 eggs
½ teaspoon salt	

Topping

1 cup finely chopped nuts	4 teaspoons cinnamon
2 tablespoons sugar	

Sift flour, cream of tartar, soda, and salt together. Cream butter. Add sugar gradually. Cream well. Beat in eggs one at a time. Add dry ingredients; blend well; refrigerate until firm enough to handle. Combine topping ingredients. Shape dough into balls the size of a small walnut. Roll in the cinnamon-nut topping. Place on greased cookie sheets. Bake at 350° for 12-15 minutes.

Elsie Lockwood

Advent Tree

In late summer, city elms,
and those sudden Trees of Heaven
swell with August's
richest green. Their leaves,
full of the season's chlorophyll,
press against our windows,
filtering sun. Our lives

grow busy then, as the air cools
and the leaves thin. In early fall,
we hardly notice how the branches'
random filigrees emerge and let
a paler light than summer's in.

And when the dormant trees
are strung electrically with bulbs,
the dead-seeming twigs entwined
with artificial stars,

an ancient prophecy is sung,
reminiscent and expectant
of the lively shoot
to come, to branch out, fresh and leafy
from a blessed ancestral stump.

Rachel Srubas
Poet and Presbyterian Minister
Used with permission.

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming from tender stem hath sprung!
Of Jesse's lineage coming, as those of old have sung.
It came, a floweret bright, amid the cold of winter,
When half spent was the night.

Isaiah 'twas foretold it, the Rose I have in mind;
Mary we behold it, the virgin mother kind.
To show God's love aright, she bore to us a Savior,
When half spent was the night.

15th Century carol,
translated by Theodore Baker, 1894.

The Third Sunday in Advent

Isaiah 35:1-10

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

New Revised Standard Version

Psalm 146:5-10

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the LORD their God,
who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith forever;

who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free;
the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.

The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;
the LORD loves the righteous.

The LORD watches over the strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

The LORD will reign forever,
your God, O Zion, for all generations.

Praise the LORD!

New Revised Standard Version

Luke 1:47-55

My soul doth magnify the Lord,
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden:
for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

For he that is mighty hath done to me great things;
and holy is his name.

And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to
generation.

He hath shewed strength with his arm;
he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He hath put down the mighty from their seats,
and exalted them of low degree.

He hath filled the hungry with good things;
and the rich he hath sent empty away.

He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy;
As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.

Authorized (King James) Version

James 5:7-10

Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

New Revised Standard Version

Matthew 11:2-11

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me." As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way

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before you.' Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

New Revised Standard Version

Collect for the Third Sunday in Advent

Lord, we beseech thee, give ear to our prayers, and by thy gracious visitation lighten the darkness of our heart, by our Lord Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

Book of Common Prayer (1549)

Gaudete Sunday

In many Advent wreaths, the candle for the third Sunday in Advent is rose colored rather than violet/purple. Rose is the color of joy and the ancient entrance prayer for this day begins with the words "Rejoice in the Lord always" from Philippians 4:4 (in Latin "Gaudete in Domino semper"). This is the midpoint of the Advent season and would be a day of rest from the penance of the traditional observation. The only other time that the rose color is used in the liturgical cycle is on Laetare Sunday the midpoint of Lent. Gaudete Sunday is the Sunday when we remember Mary's Song from Luke 1:47-55 which begins with the words My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

Stu Smith

Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus

Come, Thou long expected Jesus
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

Charles Wesley,
Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord, 1744.

Jesus Gone as the Night

A grassy cradle
bears the imprint
of the infant's tender weight,
but the night of his
newborn dreaming,
visited by kings and animals,
is gone.

The air of Galilee remembers
moving through his hair.
The sea recalls its turmoil
when the winds rose--
and its dead calm when his voice
rebuked the storm.
Birds and foxes fled to nests and holes,
but he had nowhere
to lay his head,
which is gone now,
and longed for.

North and south and east and west
converge. They cross.
They recollect the shape
of his death, arms outstretched.
The loss
of his freedom to embrace
is ours. Too many hours
pass before the women
rush in with the tomb's
fearsome, joyous news:
he's gone.

Rachel Srubas
Poet and Presbyterian Minister
Used with permission.

Advent Haiku

We wait for Christmas:
trees, tinsel, candles and gifts;
what did Mary feel?

Phil Gilman
Presbyterian Poet
Used with permission.

The Fourth Sunday in Advent

Isaiah 7:10-16

Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying, Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test. Then Isaiah said: "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.

New Revised Standard Version

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock!
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth

before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh.
Stir up your might, and come to save us!

Restore us, O God;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

O LORD God of hosts,
how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?

You have fed them with the bread of tears,
and given them tears to drink in full measure.

You make us the scorn of our neighbors;
our enemies laugh among themselves.

Restore us, O God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,
the one whom you made strong for yourself.

Then we will never turn back from you;
give us life, and we will call on your name.

Restore us, O LORD God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

New Revised Standard Version

Romans 1:1-7

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures,

the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

New Revised Standard Version

Matthew 1:18-25

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

New Revised Standard Version

Collect for the Fourth Sunday in Advent

Lord, raise up, we pray thee, thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered, thy bountiful grace and mercy, through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord, may speedily deliver us; to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be honor and glory, world without end. *Amen.*

Book of Common Prayer (1549)

Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying

Wake, awake, for night is flying;
 The watchmen on the heights are crying:
 Awake, Jerusalem, at last!
 Midnight hears the welcome voices
 And at the thrilling cry rejoices;
 Come forth, ye virgins, night is past;
 The Bridegroom comes, awake;
 Your lamps with gladness take;
 Alleluia! And for His marriage feast prepare
 For ye must go and meet Him there.

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Zion hears the watchmen singing,
And all her heart with joy is springing;
She wakes, she rises from her gloom;
For her Lord comes down all glorious,
The strong in grace, in truth victorious.
Her Star is risen, her Light is come.
Ah come, Thou blessèd One, God's own belovèd Son:
Alleluia! We follow till the halls we see
Where Thou hast bid us sup with Thee.

Now let all the heavens adore Thee,
And saints and angels sing before Thee,
With harp and cymbal's clearest tone;
Of one pearl each shining portal,
Where we are with the choir immortal
Of angels round Thy dazzling throne;
Nor eye hath seen, nor ear hath yet attained to hear
What there is ours, but we rejoice and sing to Thee
Our hymn of joy eternally.

Philipp Nicolai (*Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*). *Freudenspiegel des ewigen Lebens*, 1599.

The words may have been inspired by a 1523 poem
by Nuremberg's *Meistersinger* Hans Sachs (1494-1576);
translated by Catherine Winkworth, 1858.

Russian Teacakes

1 cup soft butter	2 ¼ cups flour
½ cup sifted confectioners' sugar	¼ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon vanilla	¾ cup finely chopped nuts

Mix butter, sugar, and vanilla thoroughly. Measure flour by dip-level-pour method or by sifting. Blend flour and salt; stir in. Mix in nuts. Chill. Heat oven to 400°. Roll into 1 inch balls. Place on an ungreased baking sheet. Bake 10 to 12 minutes. While still warm, roll in confectioners' sugar. Cool. Roll in sugar again. Makes about 4 dozen 1 inch cookies

Charlotte Whitley

Christmas Eve

Isaiah 9:2-7

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

New Revised Standard Version

Psalm 96

O sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.

Sing to the LORD, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.

Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the peoples.

For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;
he is to be revered above all gods.

For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
but the LORD made the heavens.

Honor and majesty are before him;
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts.

Worship the LORD in holy splendor;
tremble before him, all the earth.

Say among the nations, "The LORD is king!
The world is firmly established;
it shall never be moved.
He will judge the peoples with equity."

20 The Word Became Flesh

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
let the sea roar, and all that fills it;

let the field exult, and everything in it.
Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy

before the LORD; for he is coming,
for he is coming to judge the earth.

He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with his truth.

New Revised Standard Version

Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

New Revised Standard Version

Luke 2:1-20

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And

when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

Authorized (King James) Version

Collect for Christmas Eve

O God, you have caused this holy night to shine with the brightness of the true Light: Grant that we, who have known the mystery of that Light on earth, may also enjoy him perfectly in heaven; where with you and the Holy Spirit he lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.*

Book of Common Prayer (1979)

Silent Night

Silent night, holy night,
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and Child.
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night,
Shepherds quake at the sight;
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia!
Christ the Savior is born,
Christ the Savior is born!

Silent night, holy night,
Son of God, love's pure light;
Radiant beams from Thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.

Silent night, holy night
Wondrous star, lend thy light;
With the angels let us sing,
Alleluia to our King;
Christ the Savior is born,
Christ the Savior is born!

Josef Mohr, *circa* 1816-1818.

Stanzas 1 & 3 translated by John Freeman Young, 1863;
translator of stanzas 2 & 4: anonymous.

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
And with fear and trembling stand;
Ponder nothing earthly minded,
For with blessing in His hand,
Christ our God to earth descendeth,
Our full homage to demand.

King of kings, yet born of Mary,
As of old on earth He stood,
Lord of lords, in human vesture,
In the body and the blood;
He will give to all the faithful
His own self for heavenly food.

Rank on rank the host of heaven
Spreads its vanguard on the way,
As the Light of light descendeth
From the realms of endless day,
That the powers of hell may vanish
As the darkness clears away.

At His feet the six wingèd seraph,
Cherubim with sleepless eye,
Veil their faces to the presence,
As with ceaseless voice they cry:
Alleluia, Alleluia
Alleluia, Lord Most High!

Liturgy of St. James, 4th Century;
translated by Gerard Moultrie, 1864.

What Child Is This

What Child is this who, laid to rest
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
Haste, haste, to bring Him laud,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.

Why lies He in such mean estate,
 Where ox and ass are feeding?
 Good Christians, fear, for sinners here
 The silent Word is pleading.
 Nails, spear shall pierce Him through,
 The cross be borne for me, for you.
 Hail, hail the Word made flesh,
 The Babe, the Son of Mary.

So bring Him incense, gold and myrrh,
 Come peasant, king to own Him;
 The King of kings salvation brings,
 Let loving hearts enthrone Him.
 Raise, raise a song on high,
 The virgin sings her lullaby.
 Joy, joy for Christ is born,
 The Babe, the Son of Mary.

William C. Dix, *The Manger Throne*, 1865.

Christmas Eve in Nazareth

Many of my favorite holiday memories are associated with my family's annual Christmas Eve visits to Nazareth Pennsylvania. The community was founded in 1740 by the Moravians, a religious sect rich with tradition. Although we traveled to Nazareth many times throughout the year, the town took on a special meaning for me during the Christmas season.

Every December 24th, my family would make the hour-long journey to my mother's hometown. About twenty miles into the trip, my sister and I would begin to scan the Lehigh Mountains for the Star of Bethlehem. The huge electric star sat atop a hill overlooking the city of Bethlehem, another Moravian community, and was illuminated throughout Advent. The sight of the glowing star always thrilled me because it marked the beginning of our Christmas celebration.

Thirty minutes later we would arrive in Nazareth. The majority of the homes we passed were decorated simply, with white candles in the windows and wreaths on the doors. The predominant decoration was the Moravian Star, a solid, 26-pointed luminary that hung from the front porch of nearly every residence in town.

After an early dinner with my grandmother, our family would walk several blocks to the Moravian Church for the Christmas Eve Candlelight Service and Love Feast. As we entered the church and located other family members, I would crane my neck towards



the choir loft at the back of the sanctuary, hoping to catch a glimpse of my grandfather. He played violin in the orchestra, which was specially assembled for the service, and was always seated just beyond the front railing of the balcony.

One of the most unique aspects of the Moravian Christmas Eve Service is that it has remained unchanged for the last two and a half centuries. The entire order of worship, from the scripture lessons to the music, was exactly the same year after year. The first hymn was “Silent Night,” sung in both English and German. After several more hymns and readings, the elders of the church, or Dieners, would serve the Love Feast. The Love Feast, consisting of leavened rolls and sweet coffee, was a communal celebration of God’s gift to the world. Both adults and children would take part in the Love Feast, which always reminded me of a social hour in the middle of the service. There was a real feeling of fellowship as light conversation took place between friends and strangers alike.

Soon after the Love Feast ended, the responsive hymn “Morning Star” would be sung. I especially enjoyed this traditional Moravian Hymn because it was led by a young soloist, usually about my age, standing high above the altar in front of the sanctuary. I was always envious of the boy or girl who had the honor of leading the entire congregation in this stirring song.

The highlight of the service was the lighting of the candles. As we sang another Moravian hymn, “Behold the Great and Heavenly Light,” the Dieners would pass out hundreds of beeswax candles, hand-decorated with red and green ribbons. While the pastor read the Christmas story from the Bible, the candles were lit and the lights dimmed. As we sang the last verse of the final hymn, Joy to the World,” the congregation held their candles aloft. It was always a beautiful ending to an inspirational service.

Our Christmas Eve would conclude with several hours of fellowship and gift giving with the family before heading home to Perkasio. Although my sister and I would be exhausted after the evening’s festivities, we would make an effort to stay awake long enough to have a final look at the Star of Bethlehem, shining over the Lehigh Valley and serving as a reminder of the Christmas story we’d heard only hours before.

It’s been almost 25 years since I last attended the Moravian service. Both of my grandparents passed away in 1977, and my family has spent Christmas Eve in Perkasio ever since. But I look back on our Christmas Eves in Nazareth with great fondness, and perhaps I’ll have the opportunity to return with children of my own in the future. There is really nothing quite like it.

Steve Price

Joy to the World

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven, and heaven, and nature sing.

Joy to the world, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders, of His love.

Isaac Watts, *The Psalms of David*, 1719.

Holy Supper on Christmas Eve (Byzantine Catholic)

Holy Supper usually begins at twilight when the 'first star' appears. The table is covered with white tablecloth in memory of the swaddling clothes of Christ. Hay or straw is strewn on the table to remind us of the poverty of the cave Jesus was born in. A large loaf of bread is the centerpiece of the table symbolizing Christ the Bread of Life. A candle in the center of this bread recalls the Star of Bethlehem, which led men to worship the true Light of the World. This bread, along with garlic and honey, is shared by all present. Holy Supper begins with prayer in Thanksgiving for all the blessings of the past year and prayer for all good things in the coming year.

Following Holy Supper, the entire family joins in singing Christmas carols.

adapted from www.cris.com/~bronson/st-anne/recipes.html

Slovak Christmas Soup

In Eastern Christianity, there is a tradition of eating no meat during Advent. This is a soup to be eaten on Christmas Eve when the excitement and celebration was imminent but meat was still off the menu.

½ pound dry mushrooms	1 tablespoon butter
1 quart sauerkraut juice	1 small onion, chopped
1 quart water	1 tablespoon flour
1 cup rice	salt and pepper to taste

Wash dry mushrooms well in warm water. Mix sauerkraut juice and water. Place liquid over heat and bring to a boil. Add mushrooms. Simmer about 1 hour. Wash rice and drain. Add to boiling mushroom soup; simmer ½ hour or more. Brown onion, butter, and flour in skillet. Add to soup; mix well. Serves 12.

adapted from www.cris.com/~bronson/st-anne/recipes.html

Evensong

Tonight, we shed our coats and warm ourselves
in one of God's innumerable houses.
Named for neighborhoods and cities,
all these churches, with their plain or jeweled windows,
all these congregations stand
within the one name
of the season's and our hearts'
anticipation.

A single candle burns before us.
Its upright streak of flame responds
to the breeze our caroling voices make,
not by giving way to darkness,
but by swaying brightly on its wick.
When a child touches it
with a second candle, cold, unlit,
the sizzle and flare begin our sharing
of the light we've been preparing to receive.

As our sanctuary brightens, so do those
on other streets. Warmed candle wax
rains slowly underneath the multiplying fires
that illuminate our faces.
We're able, now, to look to one another
and remember God, whose inextinguishable love
has drawn us to this place.

Rachel Srubas
Poet and Presbyterian Minister
Used with permission.

Christmas Day

Isaiah 52:7-10

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the LORD to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

New Revised Standard Version

Psalms 98

O sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things.
His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory.

The LORD has made known his victory;
he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations.

He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.

Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of melody.
With trumpets and the sound of the horn
make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD.

Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
the world and those who live in it.

Let the floods clap their hands;
let the hills sing together for joy at the presence of the LORD,
for he is coming to judge the earth.

He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.

New Revised Standard Version

Hebrews 1:1-12

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right

hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you"? Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son"? And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." Of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, and his servants flames of fire." But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions." And, "In the beginning, Lord, you founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like clothing; like a cloak you will roll them up, and like clothing they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will never end."

New Revised Standard Version

John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. 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.

New Revised Standard Version

Collect for Christmas Day

God, who makest us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of thy only Son Jesus Christ, grant that as we joyfully receive him for our redeemer, so we may with sure confidence behold him when he shall come to be our judge, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. *Amen.*

Book of Common Prayer (1549)

I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day

I heard the bells on Christmas day
Their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along the unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

Till ringing, singing on its way
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime, a chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

Then from each black, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound the carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn, the households born
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

And in despair I bowed my head
“There is no peace on earth,” I said,
“For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.”

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
“God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail
With peace on earth, good will to men.”

Henry W. Longfellow, 1864.

This hymn was written during the American Civil War
and included stanzas that speak of that conflict.

They are usually omitted but in some ways
make the hymn more relevant this year.

Love Came Down at Christmas

Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, love divine;
Love was born at Christmas,
Star and angels gave the sign.

Worship we the Godhead,
Love incarnate, love divine;
Worship we our Jesus:
But wherewith for sacred sign?

Love shall be our token,
Love shall be yours and love be mine,
Love to God and to all men,
Love for plea and gift and sign.

Christina Georgina Rossetti, 1885.

The Friendly Beasts

Jesus, our Brother, strong and good,
Was humbly born in a stable rude,
And the friendly beasts around Him stood,
Jesus, our Brother, strong and good.

“I,” said the donkey, shaggy and brown,
“I carried His mother uphill and down,
I carried His mother to Bethlehem town;
I,” said the donkey, shaggy and brown.

“I,” said the cow, all white and red,
“I gave Him my manger for His bed,
I gave Him hay to pillow His head;
I,” said the cow, all white and red.

“I,” said the sheep with curly horn,
“I gave Him my wool for His blanket warm,
He wore my coat on Christmas morn;
I,” said the sheep with curly horn.

“I,” said the dove, from the rafters high,
“I cooed Him to sleep that He should not cry,
We cooed Him to sleep, my mate and I;
I,” said the dove, from the rafters high.

Thus all the beasts, by some good spell,
In the stable dark were glad to tell
Of the gifts they gave Emmanuel,
The gifts they gave Emmanuel.

Unknown, 12th Century French

The Feast of the Holy Innocents (December 28)

Jeremiah 31:15-17

Thus said Jehovah, A voice in Ramah is heard, wailing, weeping most bitter, Rachel is weeping for her sons, She hath refused to be comforted for her sons, because they are not. Thus said Jehovah: Withhold thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears, For there is a reward for thy work, An affirmation of Jehovah, And they have turned back from the land of the enemy. And there is hope for thy latter end, An affirmation of Jehovah, And the sons have turned back [to] their border.

Young's Literal Translation

Psalm 124

If it had not been Jehovah who was for us
— oh let Israel say —
If it had not been Jehovah who was for us,
when men rose up against us,
Then they had swallowed us up alive,
when their anger was kindled against us;
Then the waters had overwhelmed us,
a torrent had gone over our soul;
Then the proud waters had gone over our soul.
Blessed be Jehovah,
who gave us not up a prey to their teeth!
Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers:
the snare is broken, and we have escaped.
Our help is in the name of Jehovah,
the maker of heavens and earth.

Revelation 21:1-7

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be

any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.” And He who sits on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” And He said, “Write, for these words are faithful and true.” Then He said to me, “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. “He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.”

New American Standard Bible

Matthew 2:13-18

And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son. Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

Authorized (King James) Version

Collect for the Feast of the Holy Innocents

We remember today, O God, the slaughter of the holy innocents of Bethlehem by King Herod. Receive, we pray, into the arms of your mercy all innocent victims; and by your great might frustrate the designs of evil tyrants and establish your rule of justice, love, and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Book of Common Prayer (1979)

Coventry Carol

Lully, lullay, Thou little tiny Child,
By, by, lully, lullay.

O sisters too, how may we do,
For to preserve this day
This poor Youngling for Whom we sing
By, by, lully, lullay?

Herod the king, in his raging,
Charged he hath this day
His men of might, in his own sight,
All young children to slay.

That woe is me, poor Child for Thee!
And ever morn and day
For Thy parting neither say nor sing,
By, by, lully, lullay.

Lully, lullay, Thou little tiny Child,
By, by, lully, lullay.

Renaissance carol.

Named after the city of Coventry, England, where
the 15th Century Pageant of the Shearmen and Tailors
depicted Herod's slaughter of the innocents (Matthew 2:13-18).

Herod's Atrocities

This cruel deed of Herod is not mentioned by the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, although he relates quite a number of atrocities committed by the king during the last years of his reign. The number of these children was so small that this crime appeared insignificant amongst the other misdeeds of Herod. Macrobius (Saturn., IV, xiv, de Augusto et jocis ejus) relates that when Augustus heard that amongst the boys of two years and under Herod's own son also had been massacred, he said: "It is better to be Herod's hog [οὐσ], than his son [*houios*]," alluding to the Jewish law of not eating, and consequently not killing, swine.

Catholic Encyclopedia (1917)

The Feast of the Holy Innocents 2001

This year as a result of renewed troubles in Israel/Palestine, in the shadow of the events of September 11, and in the midst of the war in Afghanistan we are reminded even more than normally of the value and fragile nature of life— especially the lives of those who cannot protect themselves. This feast day has been observed in less troubled times as a feast for children. It is the day that the Church remembers how precious our younger members are. In some places it is a feast that features baby food on the table to remind the revelers of the centrality of children. In Spanish speaking countries it is the equivalent of April Fools day with children playing tricks on parents and older siblings. In other places it is a day to remember all persons both young and old who have died because of the oppression of unjust governments. In all the church it is a day to value life and to commit ourselves to protect those among us who cannot protect themselves.

Stuart Smith

The Sunday after Christmas

Isaiah 63:7-9

I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us, and the great favor to the house of Israel that he has shown them according to his mercy, according to the abundance of his steadfast love. For he said, "Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely"; and he became their savior in all their distress. It was no messenger or angel but his presence that saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

New Revised Standard Version

Psalm 148

Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens;
praise him in the heights!

Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his host!

Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him, all you shining stars!

Praise him, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the heavens!

Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for he commanded and they were created.

He established them forever and ever;
he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.

Praise the LORD from the earth,
you sea monsters and all deeps,

fire and hail, snow and frost,
stormy wind fulfilling his command!

Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!

Wild animals and all cattle,
creeping things and flying birds!

Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!

Young men and women alike,
old and young together!

Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted;
his glory is above earth and heaven.

He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his faithful,
for the people of Israel who are close to him.

Praise the LORD!

New Revised Standard Version

Hebrews 2:10-18

It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, saying, "I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you." And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Here am I and the children whom God has given me." Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

New Revised Standard Version

Matthew 2:13-23

Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son." When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more." When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and

went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He will be called a Nazorean."

New Revised Standard Version

Collect for the Sunday after Christmas

Almighty God, who hast given us thy only begotten Son to take our nature upon him and this day to be born of a pure Virgin, grant that we, being regenerate and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit, through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. *Amen.*

Book of Common Prayer (1549)

In the Bleak Midwinter

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,
In the bleak midwinter, long ago.

Our God, heaven cannot hold Him, nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away when He comes to reign.
In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed

The Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ.
Enough for Him, Whom cherubim, worship night and day,
Breastful of milk, and a mangerful of hay;
Enough for Him, Whom angels fall before,
The ox and ass and camel which adore.

Angels and archangels may have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim thronged the air;
But His mother only, in her maiden bliss,
Worshipped the beloved with a kiss.

What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part;
Yet what I can give Him: give my heart.

Christina Georgina Rossetti, 1872.

The Feast of the Epiphany (January 6)

Isaiah 60:1-6

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

New Revised Standard Version

Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14

Give the king your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to a king's son.

May he judge your people with righteousness,
and your poor with justice.

May the mountains yield prosperity for the people,
and the hills, in righteousness.

May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,
give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor.

May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon,
throughout all generations.

May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass,
like showers that water the earth.

In his days may righteousness flourish
and peace abound, until the moon is no more.

May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute,
may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts.

May all kings fall down before him,
all nations give him service.

For he delivers the needy when they call,
the poor and those who have no helper.

He has pity on the weak and the needy,
and saves the lives of the needy.

From oppression and violence he redeems their life;
and precious is their blood in his sight.

New Revised Standard Version

Ephesians 3:1-12

This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— for surely you have already heard of the commission of God’s grace that was given me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God’s grace that was given me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

New Revised Standard Version

Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: ‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.’” Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

New Revised Standard Version

Collect for the Epiphany

O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest thy only begotten Son to the Gentiles, mercifully grant that we, who know thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of thy glorious Godhead; through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Book of Common Prayer (1549)

We Three Kings

We three kings of Orient are;
Bearing gifts we traverse afar,
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,
Following yonder star.

Refrain O star of wonder, star of light,
Star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light.

Born a King on Bethlehem's plain
Gold I bring to crown Him again,
King forever, ceasing never,
Over us all to reign.

Refrain

Frankincense to offer have I;
Incense owns a Deity nigh;
Prayer and praising, voices raising,
Worshipping God on high.

Refrain

Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume
Breathes a life of gathering gloom;
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,
Sealed in the stone cold tomb.

Refrain

Glorious now behold Him arise;
King and God and sacrifice;
Alleluia, Alleluia,
Sounds through the earth and skies.

Refrain

John H. Hopkins, Jr., 1857.

Hopkins wrote this work as part of a
Christmas pageant for the

General Theological Seminary in New York City.

Who Were the Magi

Herodotus (I, ci) is our authority for supposing that the Magi were the sacred caste of the Medes. They provided priests for Persia, and, regardless of dynastic vicissitudes, ever kept up their dominating religious influence. . . . [It] is not unlikely that at the time of the birth of Christ . . . [the Magi were] still flourishing under the Parthian dominion.

Catholic Encyclopedia (1917)

Chalking the Doors

At least since the middle ages it has been a tradition in German speaking communities is to mark the initials of the Three Kings plus the numerals for the year in the form 20+ C+M+B+02 (Caspar/Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar) in chalk over the doors on January 6 to protect house and home. The three letters are actually supposed to come from the Latin phrase “Christus mansionem benedicat” (Christ bless this house).

Stu Smith

I Will Seek Your Good

The Preacher's open hands
embrace you, embrace everyone
who needs this benediction.
The words point you back
toward the city
you travelled through this morning
on your way here.

The streets were tranquil, then,
lined by quiet, sealed cars.
The same streets are awake now,
alive with strangers.

Go forth, then, from this place,
says the spirit through a human's lips.
And so, freshly blessed,
you go forth into the city,
looking in the future
for God's goodness, for your neighbors.

Rachel Srubas
Poet and Presbyterian Minister
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