



SONG 1 | Angels We Have Heard on High

CALL TO WORSHIP | Psalm 100

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! **Serve the Lord with gladness!** Come into his presence with singing! Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! For the Lord is good; **his steadfast love endures forever,** and his faithfulness to all generations.

WELCOME | O Sapientia (& the O Antiphones)

Sometime around the seventh century, “the Church developed a custom of praying seven great prayers, [inviting again] Christ to come, addressing [Jesus] by the [revelatory] titles found in the Old Testament, [such as]: ‘O Wisdom!’ ‘O Root [of Jesse]!’ ‘O Key [of David]!’ ‘O Light!’ ‘O Emmanuel’ [‘O King!’ and so forth.]

These prayers were [sung during evening prayers (Vespers) from December 17th to the 23rd and became known as the ‘O Antiphons.’ Don’t worry, I won’t sing the prayer for us, but would you join me in praying the first of these ancient prayers?]

O Wisdom, coming forth from the mouth of the Most High,
reaching from one end to the other mightily,
and sweetly ordering all things:
Come and teach us the way of prudence.

Each antiphon begin[s] with the [plea] ‘O’ and then calls on [Jesus], although never by name. The [prophetic, revelatory] titles...given him from the pages of the Old Testament touch our deepest needs and intuitions [to live a life different, deeper, mended]; then each antiphon prays the great Advent verb, *Veni*, ‘Come!’

[While written after the arrival of Jesus of Nazareth,] Whoever compiled these prayers was able, imaginatively, to write [them as ‘Before Christ,'] perhaps saying to themselves: ***‘If I hadn’t heard of Christ, and didn’t know the name of Jesus, I would still long for a savior. I would still need someone to come. Who would I need?’*** I would need a gift of Wisdom [of farsightedness], I would need a Light [to show the way], a King [to care and conquer], a Root [to ground for flourishing], a Key [to open to us freedom and lock out all takes life], a [Dayspring to satisfy our thirst for life].’ And pouring over the pages of the Old Testament, they would find all these things promised in the coming of Christ. [And so,] By calling on [Jesus] using each of these seven...gifts and prophecies, we learn afresh the meaning of a perhaps too familiar name.

[We'll have the O Antiphons posted on the Collective Prayer tab in the app and our website as we make the final turn to Christ's arrival. Yet,]

It might be a good Advent exercise, [contends Malcolm Guite] and paradoxically an aid to sharing the [joy of our] faith, if for a season we didn't rush in our conversation to refer to the known name, the predigested knowledge...**but waited alongside our non-Christian neighbors**, who are, of course, living 'BC.' We should count ourselves among those who walk in darkness but look for a marvelous light."¹

ADVENT STORY | "Christmas Day In The Morning"

Advent is meant for that! A season adored with symbols to help us, and others pay attention to the visions of anticipation and arrival, to the dawning of what we most desperately need but can hardly name, much as our story today portrays.

[INVITE RORI & THE KIDS TO THE STAGE STEPS – pass our coloring pages & READ] – See Additional Sheet for Slides

"Ah, that was the true joy of life, the ability to love...because long ago [love] had been born in [us] when we knew [our] father loved [us]. That was it: love alone could awaken love." Isn't that the story of our scriptures, an awakening of love by love's very presence?

Here to tell us that story from Luke 2 and light our fourth Advent candle, the candle of love, is Cohen

ADVENT WREATH | The Light of The World

That same night, the night of Jesus' birth, in amongst the other stars, a bright new star appeared. God put a special star in the sky to show where his boy was.



And now he was going to send a big choir of angels to sing his happy song to the world: *'He's here! He's come! Go and see him. My little boy.'*

Now, where would you send your splendid choir? To a big concert hall, maybe? Or a palace, perhaps? God sent his to a little hillside, outside a little town, in the middle of the night...to sing for a raggedy old bunch of shepherds watching their sheep outside of Bethlehem.

In those days, people thought shepherds were no-bodies, just scruffy, smelly, old riff-raff. But God must have thought shepherds were very important indeed, because they're the ones he chose to tell *the* good news to first.

¹ Malcolm Guite, *Waiting On The Word*, 67.

That night some shepherds were out in the open fields, warming themselves by a fire, when suddenly, standing in front of them was a huge warrior of light, blazing in the darkness.

‘Don’t be afraid of me!’ the bright shining man said. ‘I haven’t come to hurt you. I’ve come to bring you happy news of great joy for everyone everywhere. Today, in David’s town, in Bethlehem, God’s Son has been born! You can go and see him. He is sleeping in a manger.’

Behind the angel, they saw a strange glowing cloud—except it wasn’t a cloud, it was more angels...troops and troops of angels, armed with light! And they were singing a beautiful song: ‘Glory to God! To God be Fame and Honor and all the Hoorays!’

Then as quickly as they appeared, the angels left.



The shepherds stamped out their fire, left their sheep, raced down the grassy hill, through the gates of Bethlehem...to a simple home with dirt floors and a child, Heaven’s Son, the Maker of the Stars, sleeping swaddled in his mother’s arms.

This baby would be like that bright star shining in the sky that night. A Light to light up the whole world. Chasing away the darkness. Helping people to see. And the darker the night got, the brighter the star would shine.

[Pause and pick up the lighter, then read...]

“This is how God *loved* the world: He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have life forever.” (John 3:16)

[Now light the third PURPLE candle]

Hymn/Carol | It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

Dismiss Kids

2024 Commitment Cards & Christmas Eve Service Announcements

SCRIPTURE READING | Jeremiah 31:1-14

“At that time, declares the Lord, I will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and they shall be my people.” Thus says the Lord: “The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest, the Lord appeared to him from far away. I *have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.* Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall adorn yourself with tambourines and shall go forth in the dance of the merrymakers. Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant and shall enjoy the fruit. For there shall be a day when watchmen will call in the hill country of Ephraim: ‘Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God.’ ” For thus says the Lord: “Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, ‘O Lord, save your people, the remnant of Israel.’ Behold, I will bring them from the north country and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the pregnant woman and she who

is in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here. With weeping they shall come, and with pleas for mercy I will lead them back, I will make them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble, *for I am a father to Israel*, and Ephraim is my firstborn. “Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, ‘He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock.’ For the Lord has ransomed Jacob and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall be like a watered garden, and they shall languish no more. Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy; I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow. *I will feast the soul of the priests with abundance, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness*, declares the Lord.”

SONG #3 | Love Divine All Loves Excelling

SERMONETTE |

All true prophecies, apocalyptic and revelatory visions, provoke us to imagine the Kingdom of God—life with Him, all of life within His purview. All of life, nothing good nor bad, abundant or complex, holy or evil, left out. These exhaustive depictions quite naturally offer a critique of this world. Whether in direct confrontations with its ills or in the exhalation of images and energies so grand and glorious, we cannot help but notice the dimness of the days surrounding the unveiled light.

Much like the Christmas season! Everything around us becomes a visceral appeal to live differently in these days from the others, to encounter a vision of good and whole life again, to end what divides and live with joyous generosity in the days that follow. Even if the exhortations have been co-opted by marketers and entertainers, something pulsing in this season calls our minds, hearts, and souls to the thing for which we long, for which we need, for which we are made.

As people of faith, more specifically, Jesus' people, apprentices, disciples, followers, and friends, we recognize both in the season and our faith's prophecies that without him, the images and energies that capture our attention lead us only so far as to religious routine on average, or crushing devotion for some, or fleeting sentiment for most. Yet, with Him, through Him, our life lived in Him and His in ours, life is as it will be—different today, even as it is lived differently for a tomorrow. Our entire existence as “the Church” is predicated on this belief!

As we've said, prophecy not only critiques the world, it calls us to *hope*—to live for tomorrow, in the possibility and certainty of tomorrow—and calls us to *action*—to the action which is our beginning and is our end—the end of our labors, the goal of our faith, the future that is arriving now. Hope and action that we have said this Advent season, is always a response to God for us and God with us:

...the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loved you.
(Deuteronomy 23:5)

For this is how God loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:16-17)

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and **his love is perfected in us.** (1 John 4:7-12)

Loving another is not easy. Nowhere in our scriptures is it depicted as such. As we all know and Rori's story revealed, love can be missed and rendered mild in the routine of daily living. Likewise, love, while demanding, does not languish the soul, sucking it dry with anxiety and labor, but works for its satisfaction. And love, while a wonderous energy, is inept as a sentiment no matter how deeply felt. We all know that.

And yet, the true joy of life is the ability to love...because long ago [love] had been born in you when you knew [our] Father loved [you]. That is the true revelation of Christ's arrival: love alone can awaken love and perfect it.

REFLECTION |

No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and **his love is perfected in us.** (1 John 4:12)

- When did you first know our Father's love, and who is His love being perfected in you?

COLLECT & COMMUNION

“Finish then, Thy new creation; pure and spotless let us be; let us see Thy great salvation perfectly restored in Thee. Changed from glory into glory, till in heav'n we take our place, till we cast our crowns before Thee, lost in wonder, love, and praise.”

So we sang in today's carol. Our end a beginning, a life broken that our brokenness might be healed, a life poured out in love that love might be poured out and perfected in our living.

COLLECT | *Fourth Sunday of Advent*

Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, in his arriving, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Through the body, blood, and life everlasting of Jesus, amen.**

SONG #4 | The Humility of God by Young Oceans

SCRIPTURE READING | Revelation 1:1-8

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near. John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. **To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever.** Amen. Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

SONG #5 | Revelation Song by Riddle/Jobe

SONG # 6 | Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

BENEDICTION | 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

...we've got our hands full continually thanking God for you, our good friends—**so loved by God!** God picked you out as his from the very start. Think of it: included in God's original plan of salvation by the bond of faith in the living truth. This is the life of the Spirit he invited you to through the Message...in which you get in on the glory of our Master, Jesus Christ. So, friends, take a firm stand, feet on the ground and head high. Keep a tight grip on what you were taught...May Jesus himself and God our Father, **who reached out in love and surprised you with gifts of unending help and confidence,** put a fresh heart in you, invigorate your work, and enliven your speech.