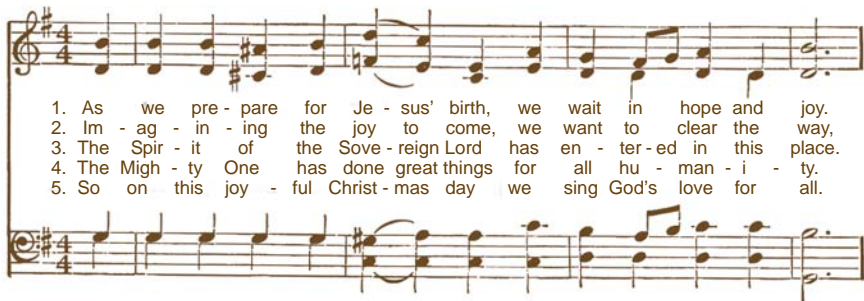
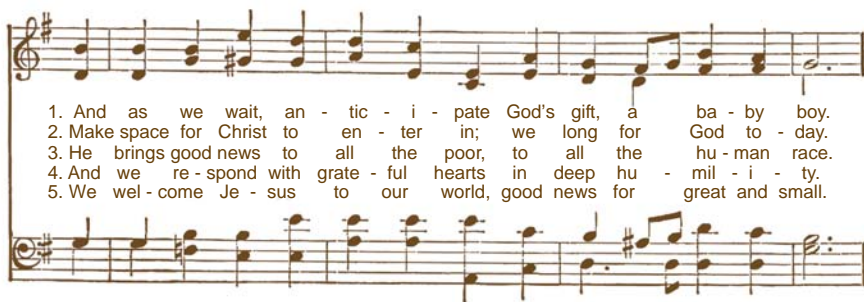


We Welcome Jesus to Our World

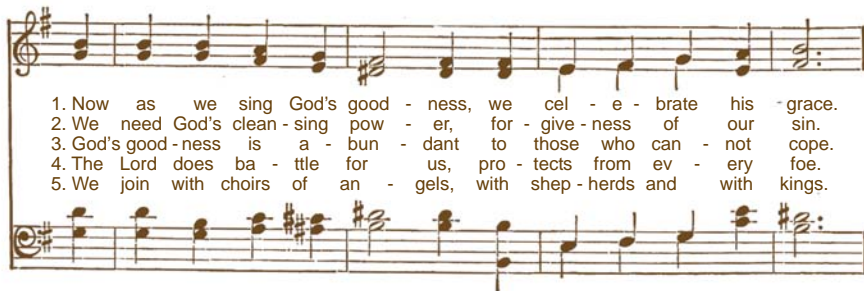
Text: Ted Faszler



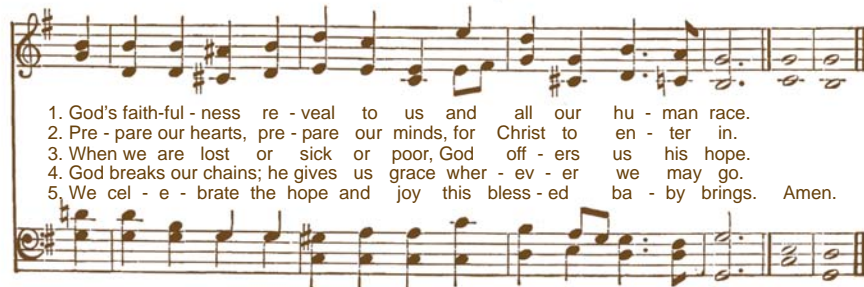
1. As we pre- pare for Je- sus' birth, we wait in hope and joy.
2. Im- ag- in- ing the joy to come, we want to clear the way.
3. The Spir- it of the Sove- reign Lord has en- ter- ed in this place.
4. The Migh- ty One has done great things for all hu- man- i- ty.
5. So on this joy- ful Christ- mas day we sing God's love for all.



1. And as we wait, an- tic- i- pate God's gift, a ba- by boy.
2. Make space for Christ to en- ter in; we long for God to- day.
3. He brings good news to all the poor, to all the hu- man race.
4. And we re- spond with grate- ful hearts in deep hu- mil- i- ty.
5. We wel- come Je- sus to our world, good news for great and small.



1. Now as we sing God's good- ness, we cel- e- brate his- grace.
2. We need God's clean- sing pow- er, for- give- ness of our sin.
3. God's good- ness is a- bun- dant to those who can- not cope.
4. The Lord does ba- ttle for us, pro- tects from ev- ery foe.
5. We join with choirs of an- gels, with shep- herds and with kings.



1. God's faith-ful- ness re- veal to us and all our hu- man race.
2. Pre- pare our hearts, pre- pare our minds, for Christ to en- ter in.
3. When we are lost or sick or poor, God off- ers us his hope.
4. God breaks our chains; he gives us grace wher- ev- er we may go.
5. We cel- e- brate the hope and joy this bless- ed ba- by brings. Amen.



Devotional Thoughts

The Season of Advent 2008

Transformed in a Moment

Ron Sisk

About the Authors

Randy Tschetter is the Director of Church Relations and Alumni. He spends many of his Sundays throughout the year visiting churches in the U.S. and Canada on behalf of Sioux Falls Seminary.

Kelly Lashly is the Instructor of Youth Ministries at Sioux Falls Seminary. She is a graduate of the seminary and is passionate about reaching out and relating to today's youth.

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Larry Porter is the newest member of the Sioux Falls Seminary faculty. He is Associate Professor of Marriage and Family Therapy.

Ron Sisk is the Academic Vice President and Dean of Sioux Falls Seminary. He also teaches in the area of Homiletics and Christian Ministry.

Ted Faszer is Professor of Educational Ministries and Church Music. He has been teaching and conducting the Sioux Falls Seminary Community Choir for thirty-two years.

Readings: Isaiah 62:6-12; Psalm 97; Titus 3:4-7; Luke 2:1-20

Reflecting upon Luke 2:1-20

So we come again to these poetic, wonderful, wonder-filled words—the story as it's been read and told at Christmastide these two thousand years and more. Mary, Joseph, the baby, and the manger. Shepherds and angels, sheep and a stable. For many of us, it isn't Christmas until we've heard this passage.

What is it that gives this story so much power? Certainly most of us don't live our days to the strains of a choir of angels. Or, at least, we don't notice that we do. Chances are most folks didn't notice that night either. But then that's the point of the story. The angels called the shepherds to see something nobody had ever seen before. This is about that pivotal moment one otherwise ordinary evening when the purposes of heaven and the progress of human history became inextricably intertwined.

From now on, everything's different. From now on, anything is possible. In some ways, every newborn presents his or her parents with hope, with the chance to start over, with a feeling that we just might get it right this time. This one, though, brings all of us the promise that we can get it right. With him leading the way, you and I can change this recalcitrant old world into something genuinely new, something truly glorious, nothing less than the sovereign reign of God on earth.

We begin by letting him change us. The child is born, and with the shepherds you and I are transformed in a moment from careworn protectors of the status quo to startled seekers after God's surprise. We leave our old lives behind. We go looking for what God is doing. Truth is, that's what his people have done ever since that night. Again and again Jesus makes himself known in our world. And, again and again you and I find hope. With the angels, we glorify and praise God for what we hear and what we see. He comes, and it really is Christmas!

Prayer: Lord, help me go again to Bethlehem. I want to see the star, to stand in the stable, to hear again the child's low cry, and wonder at the sound of the angel chorus. Make it real in my heart this season, Lord. Renew in me the hope this baby brings. Amen.

Preparing the Way

Kelly Lashly

Readings: Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; II Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8

When I was a child, my family would make a long, twelve-plus-hour Christmas trek to my grandparents' homes in Oklahoma. It was a long drive that provided a lot of time for my imagination to run wild. Some of the Christmas songs playing on the radio would cause me to think about Jesus' birth, and then I would picture the scene in my mind.

The imagining practice in which I engaged during those long car trips has now turned into what I refer to as an Advent spiritual discipline. Now, once the Christmas decorations are in their proper place in my home and the boxes are all put away, I plug in the Christmas tree lights, light the candles around the nativity set, and find a comfortable place to sit.

Then, I let my imagination run wild. I begin to think about the first coming of Jesus Christ—Mary and Joseph, the baby Jesus, the stable, the shepherds, angels singing, God's amazing plan to save sinners, God's love, Jesus' earthly life, Jesus' sacrifice, my present relationship with Christ, and so on. I have come to understand that this simple little practice has become a time to prepare my heart and mind for a new Advent season.

When I read the Isaiah and Mark passages, the phrase "Prepare the way," stood out to me. The picture tied with preparing the way is one of a servant going before a king to announce his coming and to clear the path or road. John the Baptist was announcing the coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. He was preparing the way in people's hearts and minds, making them ready to receive God's gift of love and forgiveness through his Son, Jesus Christ.

My simple Advent practice of pondering Jesus' first coming and my relationship with him helps me "prepare the way" to experience Jesus in a fresh and sometimes new way each Christmas season. I encourage you to allow these weeks of Advent to be a time of preparation in your life. Find ways to make space in your life to prepare your heart and mind to receive God's gifts of love, grace, and mercy in new ways this Christmas.

Prayer: O Lord, help me prepare the way for you to come into my life in fresh ways this Christmas. Open my eyes to see you as you truly are. Open my ears to hear your truth. Open my heart and make me ready to follow all your ways. Amen.

Sharing the Good News

Jay Moon

Readings: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126; I Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28

Do you remember the first time that you stood in front of people to teach God's word? I do. I finally had a chance to teach something that had been burning in my heart for a long time. I carefully chose a passage that conveyed what I felt was most important for people to hear, and I couldn't wait to let it out.

In Luke 4, Jesus finally stood in front of people to teach God's word publicly for the first time. He had waited an eternity for this moment, and he carefully chose a passage that conveyed his deep purpose and mission. It starts with, "The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor."

In his first public sermon, Jesus affirms that he is anointed by the Holy Spirit in order to preach good news—to the poor. For some reason, the good news is tied to the poor! To further pound this nail home, the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5) starts similarly, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven."

The Kingdom of heaven is tied to the poor in spirit! Ponder this for a minute: If the gospel of the Kingdom is good news for the poor, then how am I interacting with the poor in my community, whether physically, emotionally, spiritually, or relationally? Perhaps we miss crucial aspects of the good news when we do not find ways to engage the poor, thereby reducing the gospel to another self-help guide. Could our own spiritual growth be stunted when we are too distracted to interact with the poor/marginal in our society? Could our church be turning inward because we forget that the mission of the church is to be a sign and foretaste of the Kingdom, which somehow involves the poor?

During Advent, please take time to reflect on how the good news of Jesus is tied to the poor in your community. It may be your turn to bring God's word and presence to the poor and marginal in your community.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for the good news. Remind me again, as you did at first, that this good news involves the poor in spirit and marginal people in society. Help me to be a conduit of your blessings and not merely a cul-de-sac. Amen.

December 21, 2008

God's Great Provisions

Larry Porter

Readings: II Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:47-55; Romans 16:25-27;
Luke 1:26-38

As I read through the passages of scripture, I was struck by a sense of humbleness and humility on David's part in particular. He was concerned that he was living in a palace of cedar while the ark of God remained in a tent. Remarkable in my mind is the fact that God used this as an opportunity to flood David with a great outpouring of wellbeing—"The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever" (II Samuel 7:11b, 16).

In II Samuel 7:8-9, God speaks to David through Nathan, "I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you." The Lord does battle on our behalf to cut off our enemies, enemies that would keep us from entering into and living in the fullness of his Kingdom.

With Mary, as well, we read in Luke 1:47-48 that her "spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant." Again, humility is significant as Mary expresses recognition of her social position. Nevertheless, she was fully cognizant of the history of God's provision through the generations and of his activity in all realms of life, noting that his mercy extends not to the rulers but to the humble (Luke 1:52-55).

At this time of celebrating the coming of the King through very humble circumstances, we celebrate his coming into our lives to set us free from the chains of bondage. We rejoice in God our savior, "the Mighty One has done great things for [us]—holy is his name" (Luke 1:49).

Prayer: Lord, we take this opportunity to thank you for dealing with us in such a gracious and merciful way. You have set us free. We celebrate this season of anticipating your coming into the world. With humble and grateful hearts, may we continually rejoice in you, God our savior through Jesus Christ. Amen.

November 30, 2008

Waiting with Great Anticipation

Randy Tschetter

Readings: Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9;
Mark 13:24-37

Reflecting upon 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

The musical lyrics to a recent TV commercial declare: "I want it all, I want it all, and I want it now." I admit that patience is not one of my strongest virtues. I am not very keen about waiting in check-out lines, waiting for tables at restaurants, or waiting at red traffic lights. I want what I want now rather than later.

The New Testament scripture text being read in churches all around the world on this first Sunday in Advent is addressed to people who were waiting. In particular, they were waiting for the "Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed," (verse 7). The anticipated and hoped-for event to which Paul referred was that of Christ's return—his second Advent—that day on which Christ will be fully "revealed" and bring to completion his work of redemption.

In these days leading up to Christmas, Christians around the world are also waiting. With great anticipation, we count down the days as we remember and celebrate the blessings of Christ's first Advent—new life, forgiveness, peace, joy, and the promise of eternal life in the presence of God. It is a time of waiting rooted in the assurance of Christ's second Advent. The current Advent season is dependent upon the "blessed hope"—the glorious appearing of Jesus at his second Advent (Titus 2:13), and the second Advent is only made possible because of the blessings of the first Advent.

As we wait, we rejoice "because of his grace" given to us in Christ Jesus (verse 4). Certainly God desires us to live holy lives, but he loves and saves us just as we are. Moreover, our lives are "enriched" (verse 5)—we have been made wealthy—with the spiritual gifts which are necessary for the life God calls us to live in this world. And, we are made to be "blameless," (verse 8) prepared for the "day of the Lord" as those who are forgiven and confident in Jesus who is "faithful" (verse 9).

Prayer: Lord God, renew within us a sense of holy excitement as we await the coming of the Lord Jesus. Grant that in our waiting, the Lord Jesus Christ will be revealed anew in our world. Amen.