



2020 Advent Devotionals

The Fourth Week of Advent
December 20 - 24, 2020

Hark a Thrilling Voice

**1 Hark! a thrilling voice is sounding.
“Christ is nigh,” it seems to say;
“Cast away the works of darkness,
O ye children of the day.”**

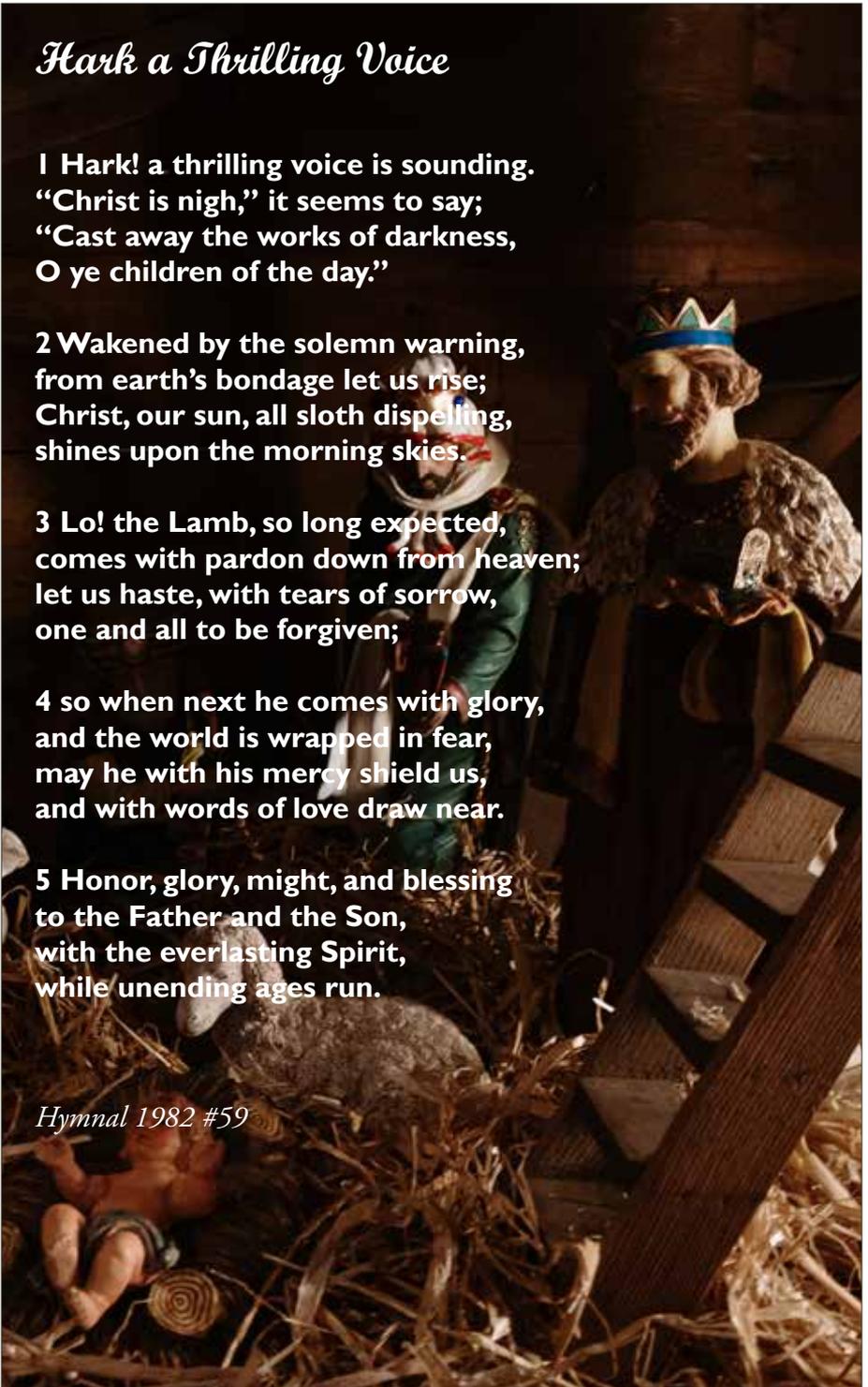
**2 Wakened by the solemn warning,
from earth’s bondage let us rise;
Christ, our sun, all sloth dispelling,
shines upon the morning skies.**

**3 Lo! the Lamb, so long expected,
comes with pardon down from heaven;
let us haste, with tears of sorrow,
one and all to be forgiven;**

**4 so when next he comes with glory,
and the world is wrapped in fear,
may he with his mercy shield us,
and with words of love draw near.**

**5 Honor, glory, might, and blessing
to the Father and the Son,
with the everlasting Spirit,
while unending ages run.**

Hymnal 1982 #59



Sunday, December 20, 2020

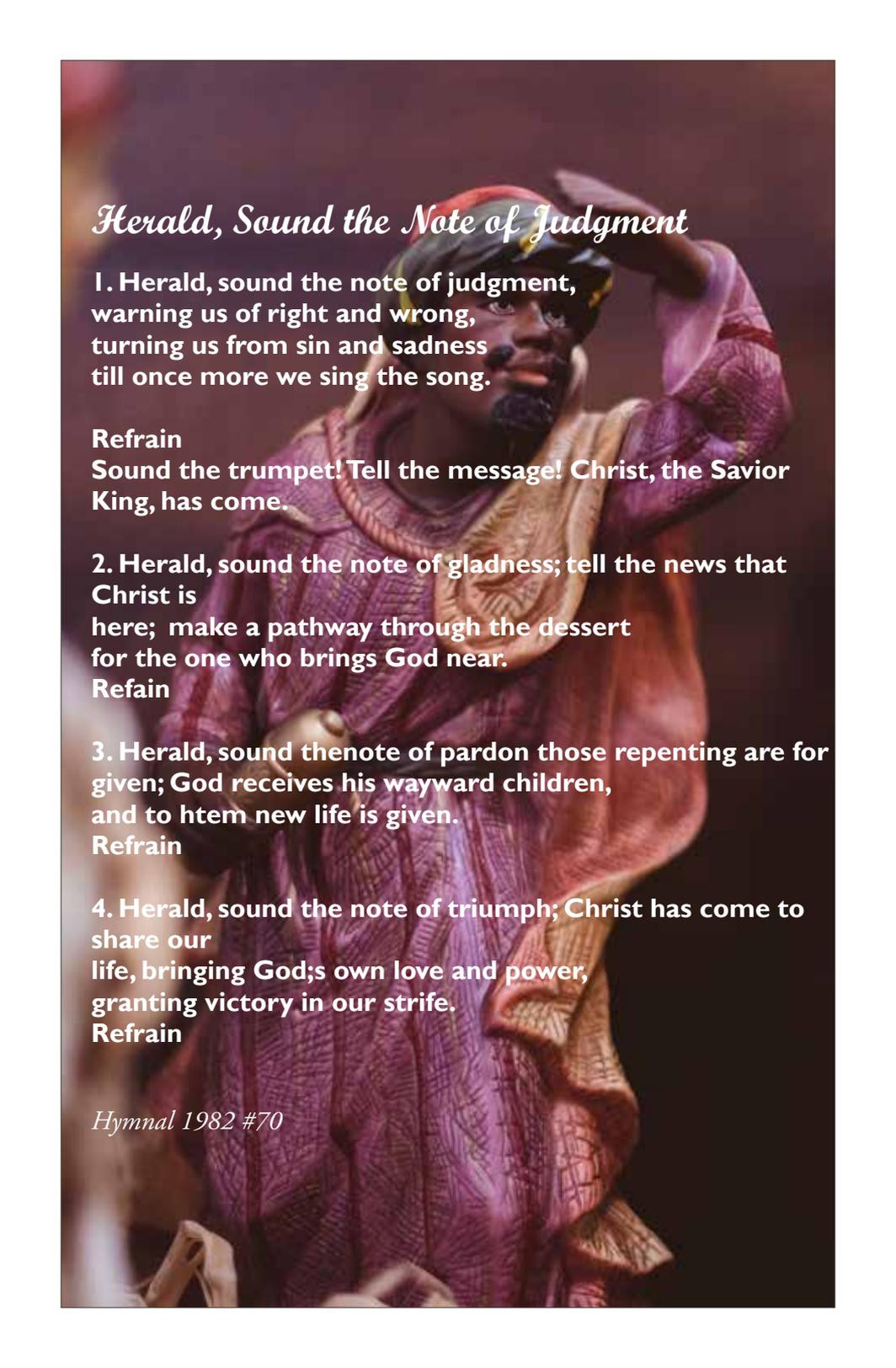
Episcopal priest Fleming Rutledge has written that Advent begins in the dark. The readings for Advent 1 bear this out. Isaiah begs God to rend the heavens and come down and save us. The psalmist asks God to turn the light of his countenance on us again, and wonders how long God's anger will last. Then, in Mark's gospel, Jesus describes a time of such devastation that even the sun and the moon shall not give their light, and the stars shall fall from the sky. But then comes the wonder that is the basis for this hymn: "Lo, he comes, with cloud descending, once for our salvation slain... Alleluia! Alleluia! Christ the Lord returns to reign."

Early Christians waited eagerly for this event. A little later, they began to long for it. Later still they began to doubt it would ever come. And while we give it lip service, we are probably there with them most days.

What if Jesus is waiting for us to create the conditions for his dramatic entrance? We pray in the words he gave us, "thy kingdom come, thy will be done." What if he's waiting for us to work with him to bring the kingdom to earth?

Beloved, pray this Advent that we do the things Jesus would have us do to bring the kingdom, right here in Bell County, Texas.

The Rev. Glenda Hardin, Deacon



Herald, Sound the Note of Judgment

1. Herald, sound the note of judgment,
warning us of right and wrong,
turning us from sin and sadness
till once more we sing the song.

Refrain

Sound the trumpet! Tell the message! Christ, the Savior
King, has come.

2. Herald, sound the note of gladness; tell the news that
Christ is
here; make a pathway through the desert
for the one who brings God near.

Refrain

3. Herald, sound the note of pardon those repenting are for
given; God receives his wayward children,
and to them new life is given.

Refrain

4. Herald, sound the note of triumph; Christ has come to
share our
life, bringing God's own love and power,
granting victory in our strife.

Refrain

Hymnal 1982 #70

Monday, December 21, 2020

Herald, sound the note of judgment, warning us of the right and wrong, turning us from sin and sadness till once more we sing the song. Sound the trumpet!

Tell the message! Christ, the Savior King has come.

Moir A. J. Waters spent time in India, teaching at Indore Theological Seminary and evangelizing in nearby villages. After his retirement, he published privately three small collections of hymns he had written since returning to Canada, of which only one for Advent, "Herald! sound the note of judgment," had already become widely known. It was published in 1998. Scriptures used are: Psalm 47, 81, 85, Isaiah 40:1-11, Matthew 3, 1-12, Matthew 24:29-44, Mark 1:1-8, Mark 13:24-37, Luke 3:1-18, John 1:19-28. The theme is Evangelism; John the Baptist. The composer is Joachim Neander.

The hymn is not familiar to me but the only way to really appreciate a song is to first learn about the origin and then learn to sing it.

Gloria Hooper

Prepare the Way

**1. Prepare the way O Zion, your Christ is drawing near!
Let every hill and valley a level way appear.
Great One who comes in glory, foretold in sacred story.**

Refrain

Oh, blest is Christ that came in God's most holy name.

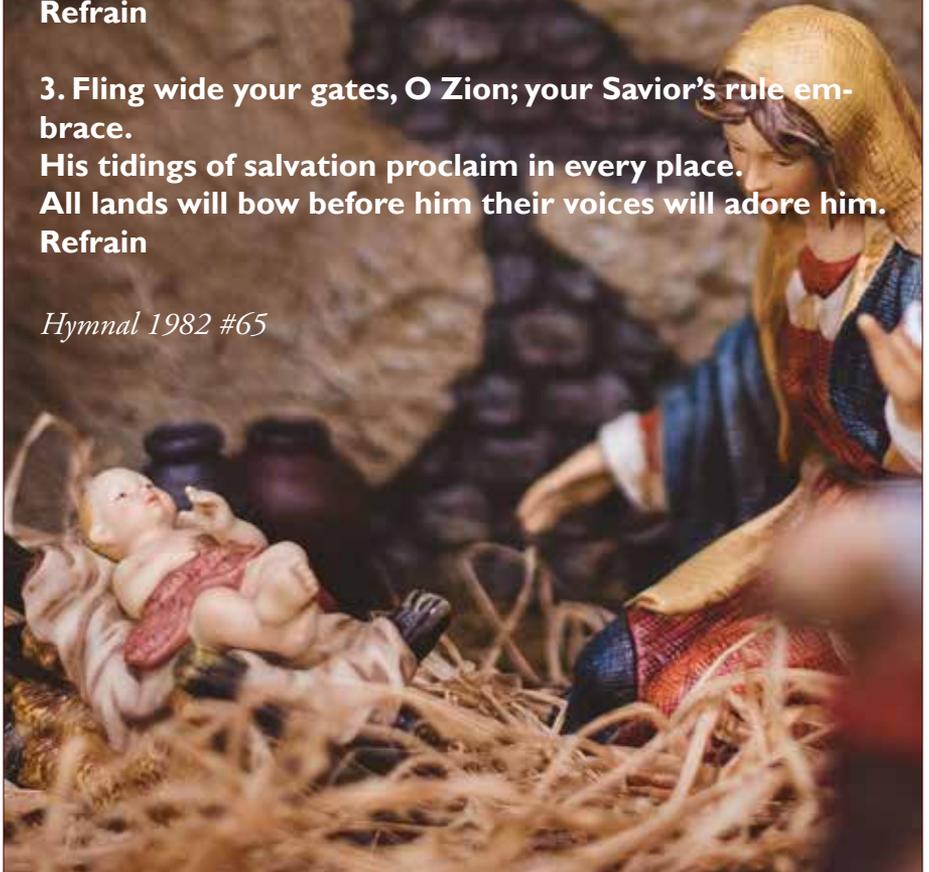
**2. He brings God's rule, O Zion; he comes from heaven
above.
His rule is peace and freedom, and justice, truth, and love.
Lift high your praise resounding , for grace and
joy abounding.**

Refrain

**3. Fling wide your gates, O Zion; your Savior's rule em-
brace.
His tidings of salvation proclaim in every place.
All lands will bow before him their voices will adore him.**

Refrain

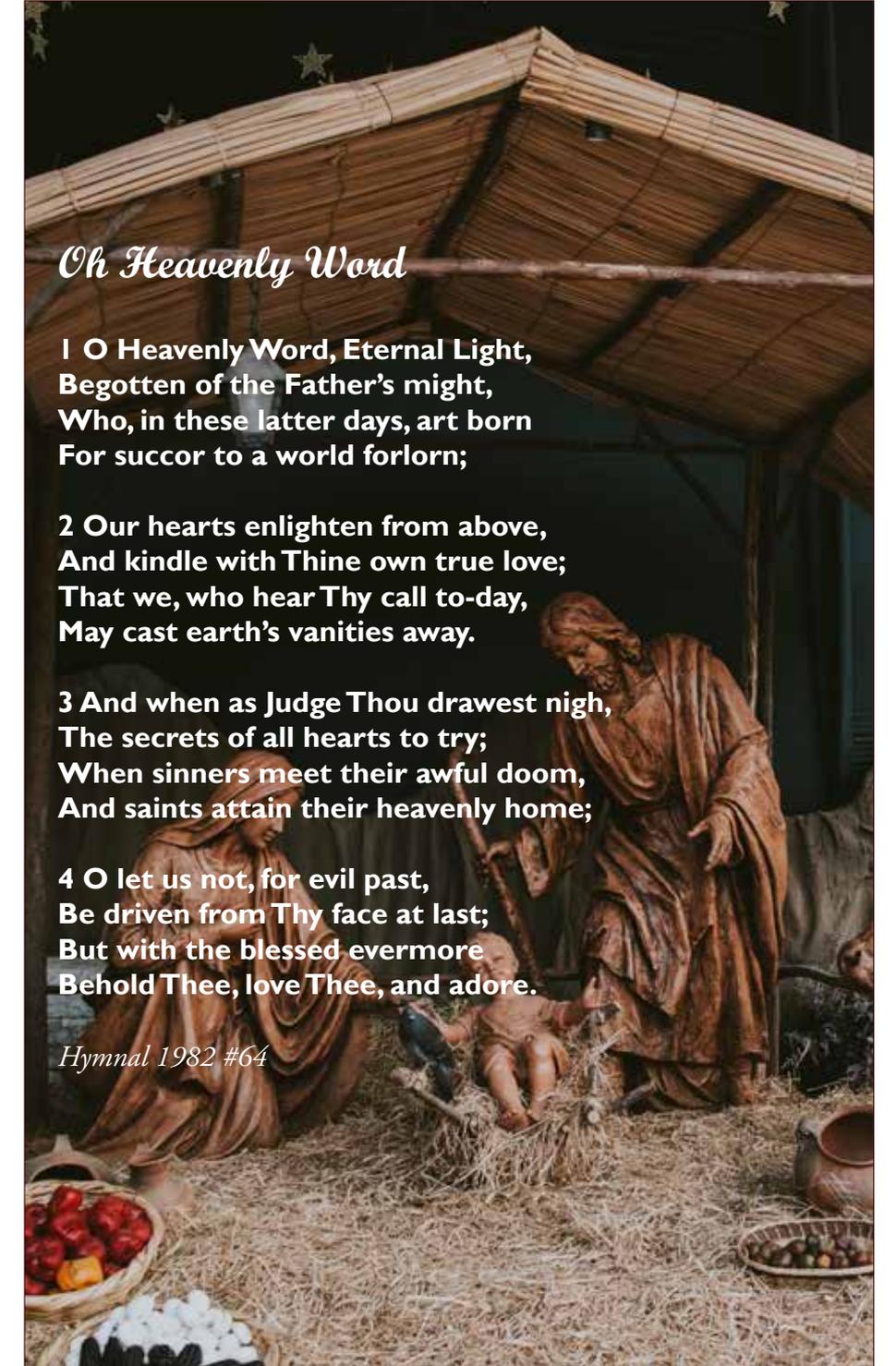
Hymnal 1982 #65



Tuesday, December 22, 2020

What is the meaning and significance of the word Zion in the beginning of all three verses? It comes from the Hebrew *siyyôn* (“castle”). In the Old Testament, David captures the Jebusite citadel of Zion and establishes his capital there, the City of David, Jerusalem, the place where God dwells in Jewish theology. In the New Testament, the scope of Zion is broadened. Mount Zion refers to the heavenly Jerusalem, God’s holy and eternal city; and to the Church, the whole kingdom of God in heaven and throughout the earth. This hymn is the essence of John the Baptist’s call at the Jordan in the wilderness. John still calls us today in Advent from the sacred story. The hymn makes a promise of grace and joy abounding to those who accept the call and embrace the Savior’s rule. Can that promise be trusted? After 3/4th century of experience as a follower of Christ I can testify that the promise is valid without qualifications. I praise God for grace and joy and the peace and freedom of his rule in the spiritual and emotional Citadel of Jesus who came in God’s most holy name.

Art Boyer

A detailed wooden manger scene set within a rustic stable. The roof is made of woven straw. Mary is seated on the left, looking towards the infant Jesus who lies in a nest of straw. Joseph stands on the right, leaning over the manger. The floor is covered in straw, and various items like a basket of red fruit, a bowl of white eggs, and a wooden pot are visible in the foreground. The background is dark with small stars, suggesting a night sky.

Oh Heavenly Word

1 O Heavenly Word, Eternal Light,
Begotten of the Father's might,
Who, in these latter days, art born
For succor to a world forlorn;

2 Our hearts enlighten from above,
And kindle with Thine own true love;
That we, who hear Thy call to-day,
May cast earth's vanities away.

3 And when as Judge Thou drawest nigh,
The secrets of all hearts to try;
When sinners meet their awful doom,
And saints attain their heavenly home;

4 O let us not, for evil past,
Be driven from Thy face at last;
But with the blessed evermore
Behold Thee, love Thee, and adore.

Hymnal 1982 #64

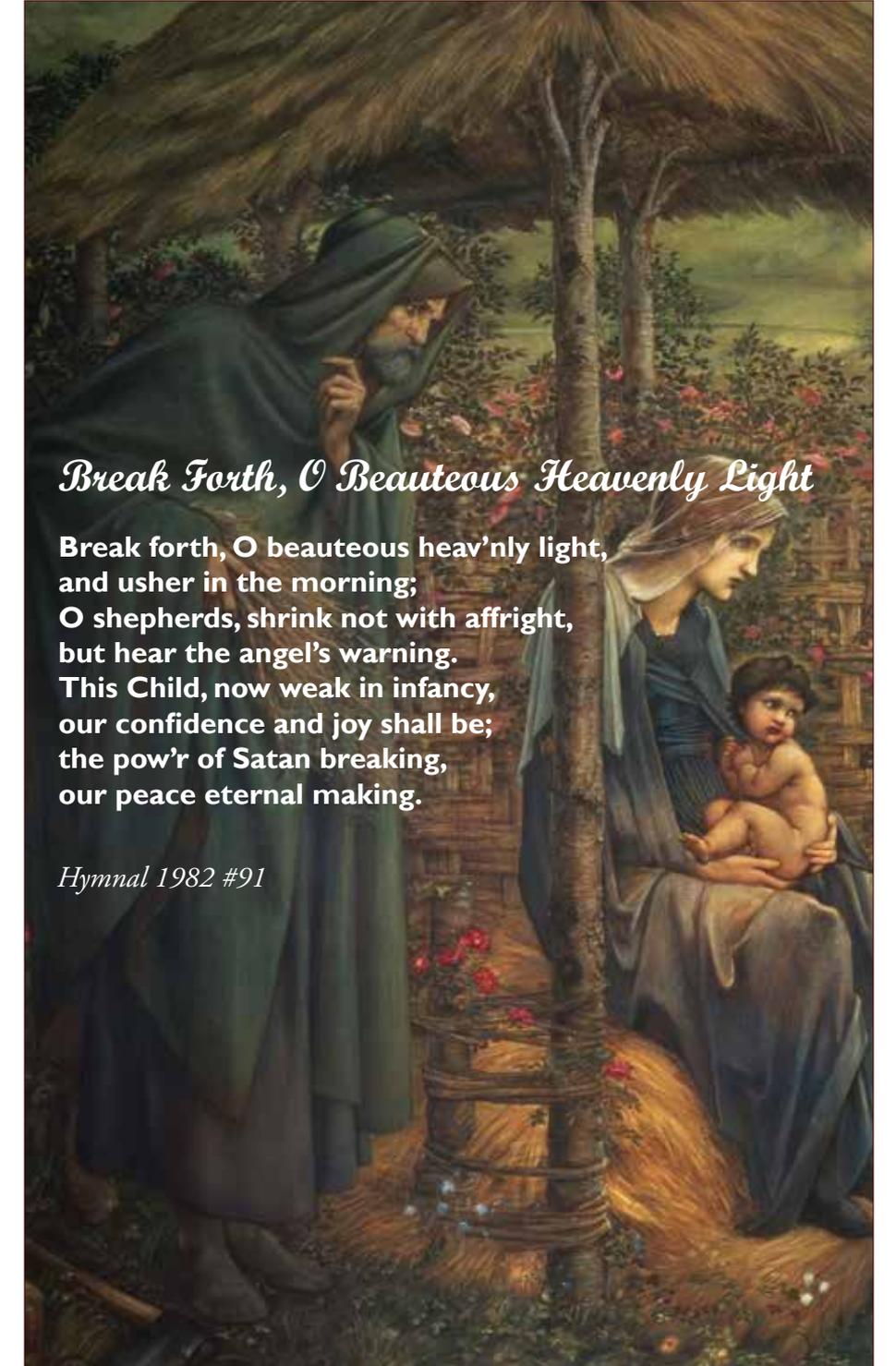
Wednesday, December 23, 2020

Hymn # 64 is indeed appropriate for this particular Advent season. It reminds us that Jesus was born as a blessing to a world forlorn, to shine a light upon us and kindle a fire in our hearts to burn away all desire to sin in our hope that we may one day live with Him and all the saints.

We do indeed feel like a world forlorn this day. 2020 has been a year of great trial and tribulation. Our days have been consumed with worries – the pandemic, divisive partisan squabbles, the quest for racial justice, just to name a few. Only our faith in God through Christ Jesus has helped us find any hope and peace in these very dark times. We must search our hearts and examine our souls and our faith to find what we are called to do and be. Will we follow the Lamb of God or will we stray like lost sheep?

Though we will forever fall short of purging all sin from our hearts, we have God's promise of mercy and grace if we welcome Him into our hearts. Thank goodness for that!

Helen Pickle Normand



Break Forth, O Beauteous Heavenly Light

**Break forth, O beauteous heav'nly light,
and usher in the morning;
O shepherds, shrink not with affright,
but hear the angel's warning.
This Child, now weak in infancy,
our confidence and joy shall be;
the pow'r of Satan breaking,
our peace eternal making.**

Hymnal 1982 #91

All of a sudden, dawn arrives. Light fills the air.

Singing “Break Forth, O Beauteous Heavenly Light” on Christmas Eve tells us why we waited these past four weeks of Advent, anticipating, wondering. In our 1982 Hymnal, “Break Forth” is only one verse, but it’s packed with meaning. A “weak child in infancy” lies in an animal trough. All of a sudden, things are different. A bright star stabs the darkness. This baby becomes “our confidence and joy.” Forces of evil are defeated; hope streams through the barn door slats.

This hymn, often attributed to Johann Sebastian Bach, actually is the product of collaboration across three centuries. The author of the original German stanza is Johann Rist (1607-1667) with an English translation by John Troutbeck (1832-1899). The melody was composed by Johann Schop (ca. 1590-ca. 1664). Bach (1685-1750) added the harmonization.

The power and beauty of this hymn is in Bach’s harmony, not the tune. The harmony gives depth and interest to a straightforward melody. This is no accident. The hymn is a unified work; each note, each chord complements the other in perfect balance. The whole becomes greater than its parts.

“Break Forth” tells us morning is here, a new way of life with Christ has begun and that Satan has given way to “our peace eternal making.” All of a sudden, daylight bursts forth in creation perfected, and we are transformed.

Patty Benoit

The Song of Mary

Magnificat Luke 1:46-55

Week 1

Advent candle: Prophecy/Hope

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; *

for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed: *

the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name.

Week 2

Advent candle: Bethlehem/Preparation

He has mercy on those who fear him *
in every generation.

He has shown the strength of his arm, *

he has scattered the proud in their conceit.

Week 3

Advent candle: Shepherd/Joy

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, *
and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things, *
and the rich he has sent away empty.

Week 4

Advent candle: Angel/Love

He has come to the help of his servant Israel, *
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,

The promise he made to our fathers, *
to Abraham and his children for ever.