



*2020 Advent Devotionals*

*The First Week of Advent*  
November 29 - December 5, 2020



The hymns of Advent are the deepest cry of our hearts.

Of all the liturgical seasons in the Christian year, the four Sundays in Advent are the most musical. The Book of Luke divides the birth and childhood of Jesus into four significant periods, each keyed to a specific hymn text in the Gospel account. Each time when a hymn appears, someone who has been deeply affected by the presence of the Christ Child sings with profound sincerity and love.

This season's Advent devotional book centers on music of these sacred weeks – no, not Christmas carols sung on and after Dec. 25. Rather, these are hymns of yearning and wonder. Each adds depth to our Advent devotions: teach, redeem, deliver, lead, enlighten, and save.

Some hymns in this booklet are ancient verses reflecting prophecy and biblical imagery expressing a longing for the Messiah. Others are poetic and theologically profound works of our harried modern age.

Yes, these are songs of joy and delight, but they also reflect yearning, expectancy, and aching for a new way of life.

All reflect the emotion of the 18th-century French hymn:

*O come, divine Messiah!*

*The world in silence waits the day*

*When hope shall sing its triumph,*

*And sadness flee away.*





# *The Song of Mary*

*Magnificat* Luke 1:46-55

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.  
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.  
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.  
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.  
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.



## *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*

**Refrain:**

**Swing low, sweet chariot,  
Coming for to carry me home.**

**Swing low, sweet chariot,  
Coming for to carry me home.**

**1 I looked over Jordan, and what did I see  
Coming for to carry me home.**

**A band of angels coming after me,  
Coming for to carry me home. [Refrain]**

**2 If you get there before I do,  
Coming for to carry me home.**

**Tell all my friends I'm coming too,  
Coming for to carry me home. [Refrain]**

**3 The brightest day that ever I saw  
Coming for to carry me home.**

**When Jesus wash'd my sins away,  
Coming for to carry me home. (refrain)**

**4 I'm sometimes up and sometimes down,  
Coming for to carry me home.**

**But still my soul feels heavenly bound,  
Coming for to carry me home. [Refrain]**

*Lift Every Voice and Sing #18*

This Advent we are changing things up a bit. Instead of meditating on a piece of Scripture, we are using Advent Hymns from the 1982 Hymnal and the Episcopal church supplement, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*. These hymns are rich in history, imagery, and are, of course, scripturally based. In fact, preachers recognize that most in the congregation get their theology (understanding of God) from, not our sermons, but from music! The words we sing, the tunes that stay as earworms inform, and inspire our faith.

And so it is with much joy that we now turn to these Advent hymns, or in today's case, to the hymn "*Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*." I bet that tune is running through your head as you read the title. This is a classic, well known, and well loved. For many of us it is one of our best known African-American spirituals. It may surprise you to know that one train of thought is that this was written by "Wallis Willis, a Choctaw freedman in Oklahoma, who was inspired to write the song when viewing the Red River." Now that brings it closer to home! Others believe it was an old song sung by slaves.

Either way, it is a hopeful song in the midst of good times and bad times; "still my soul feels heavenly bound." As a child this song captured my imagination. Before connecting it to Elijah's ascent into heaven, I wondered about a chariot taking us to heaven. My vision of a chariot came straight from Cinderella and her beautiful pumpkin coach. That would be a lovely way to arrive at the pearly gates.

But what captures my attention the most is the author's ability to focus heavenward, to look up, amidst a life of, well a life. Life is naturally filled with up and downs. Seems as if the world is in a down period right now. Much like the first century. Yet, this song and Advent, invite us to look up. To focus on God, whether it is the birth of God's son at Christmas or our eternal life waiting for us when we cross the Jordan. This is a hopeful song. And isn't that what Advent is all about?

*The Rev. Janice Krause, Interim Rector*

## *Wayfaring Stranger*

1 I'm just a poor wayfaring stranger,  
I'm trav'ling through this world below;  
There is no sickness, toil, nor danger,  
In that bright world to which I go.  
I'm going there to see my father,  
I'm going there no more to roam;  
I'm just a going over Jordan,  
I'm just a going over home.

2 I know dark clouds will gather o'er me,  
I know my pathway's rough and steep;  
But golden fields lie out before me,  
Where weary eyes no more shall weep.  
I'm going there to see my mother,  
She said she'd meet me when I come;  
I'm just a going over Jordan,  
I'm just a going over home.

3 I want to sing salvations story,  
In concert with the blood-washed band;  
I want to wear a crown of glory,  
When I get home to that good land.  
I'm going there to see my brothers,  
They passed before me one by one;  
I'm just a going over Jordan,  
I'm just a going over home.

4 I'll soon be free from every trial,  
This form will rest beneath the sod;  
I'll drop the cross of self-denial,  
And enter in my home with God.  
I'm going there to see my Saviour,  
Who shed for me His precious blood;  
I'm just a going over Jordan,  
I'm just a going over home.



**Monday, November 30, 2020**

My sister once told me that home was a person, not a place. Those words really rang true when I fell in love with the man who became my husband. No matter where we lived, I was always home. As much as I love my life with him, there has only been one home that I have had for as long as I've had memories and that I know I will have forever. That home is in Christ. True, I run away from home from time to time but I will always come back because, as Dorothy says, there's no place like home. In the end, I know the one place where I will always belong: with our Lord. Whether we call it the Jordan, the River Styx, or the Gjöll, I know that God, my one true home, will be there for me when I finally cross over.

*Clare Stratmann*



*Behold Your God*

**Oh thou that tellest good tidings to Zion,  
Oh thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem:  
Lift up your voice with strength,  
Lift it up don't be afraid.**

**Behold your God.  
Arise, and shine, for the light of the world is come.  
Behold your God!  
Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord**

*Lift Every Voice and Sing #2*

**Tuesday, December 1, 2020**

These words appear in Isaiah 40. The first 39 Chapters the writer underscores on the judgement that Israel is to expect by putting their trust in secular rulers and governments. In the words of this Hymn, we are given the resounding expectation that their God is revealing Himself in a tender but strident way. On the Mount of Zion, in the city of Jerusalem...encompassing the land and people that God holds as His cherished and beloved. Yahweh is advancing. He is advancing to illuminate an expanse of love that is totally absorbing, and totally illuminating.

This is a hope that is pressing into a time of distress and hardship, of fear and dismay. The circum-stances in our world today are such a time. Dissonance; death; intolerance; disease; fear; uncertainty. (We can add more words that are descriptive of 2020 as we head into Advent.) We have experienced the harmful and destructive trying to penetrate our core.

But our hearts and arms open; our souls reflect a life beyond our circumstances. We Arise and Shine and proclaim "Behold Your God!". "The Light of the World is come!"  
"The Light" chooses to reflect Himself in us and to the world around us.

Thanks Be to God...

*The Rev. Becky Sparks, Deacon*



*Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord*

**Refrain:**

**Prepare ye the way of the Lord.**

**Prepare ye the way of the Lord.**

**1 Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.**

**[Refrain]**

**2 Fill ev'ry valley, bring all mountains low. [Refrain]**

**3 Go up to a mountain and shout with a loud voice.**

**[Refrain]**

**4 Say to all people, here is your God. [Refrain]**

*Lift Every Voice and Sing #11*



On Good Friday, April 1963, a man and his friends were roughed up by authorities and thrown in jail. The man, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, employed his most potent weapons – a pen and his formidable eloquence to write “*Letter from a Birmingham Jail.*”

In those few pages, he outlined a systematic and effective strategy for non-violent civil rights campaigns. He wrote about “four basic steps: collection of the facts to determine whether injustices are alive, negotiation, self-purification, and direct action.”

Get ready, he said, for the struggle ahead. Dr. King was telling his followers that all meaningful journeys begin with one word: Prepare.

“Self-purification” is King’s call for his followers to strengthen their relationships, to re-new their commitment to the work, and to turn away from divisions and hidden agendas that twist and divert their goals.

“Self-purification” is Dr. King’s call for repentance and “make straight paths.”

Dr. King parallels John the Baptist’s pleas to “prepare the way of the Lord,” just as Jesus follows him with sermons about reconciliation and forgiveness. New directions require us to accept a humbling state of obedience to God and moral repentance – “make the path straight.” Then we can truly become instruments of peace and lasting change.

*Patty Benoit*

# *We're Marching To Zion*

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

## **Refrain:**

**We're marching to Zion,  
Beautiful, beautiful Zion;  
We're marching upward to Zion,  
The beautiful city of God.**

**1 Come, we that love the Lord,  
And let our joys be known;  
Join in a song with sweet accord,  
Join in a song with sweet accord,  
And thus surround the throne,  
And thus surround the throne.**

**2 Let those refuse to sing  
Who never knew our God;  
But children of the heav'nly King,  
But children of the heav'nly King,  
May speak their joys abroad,  
May speak their joys abroad. (refrain)**

**3 The hill of Zion yields  
A thousand sacred sweets  
Before we reach the heav'nly fields,  
Before we reach the heav'nly fields,  
Or walk the golden streets,  
Or walk the golden streets. (refrain)**

**4 Then let our songs abound,  
And ev'ry tear be dry;  
We're marching through Immanuel's ground,  
We're marching thro' Immanuel's ground,  
To fairer worlds on high,  
To fairer worlds on high. (refrain)**

*Lift Every Voice and Sing #12*

You have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God.

Hebrews 12:22

Should we sing psalms or hymns in our services? This was the controversy stirring many congregations during the 17th and 18th centuries. Isaac Watts was a life-long champion of the “humanly composed” hymn while the majority of churches insisted on singing only traditional psalm settings.

Tempers flared and some churches actually split because of this controversy. In some churches a compromise was instituted in which the psalm setting would be sung in the early part of the service with a hymn used at the close, during which those who wished could leave or simply not sing.

Isaac Watts’ “*We’re Marching to Zion*” was no doubt written in part to refute his critics, who termed his hymns “Watts’ Whims,” as well as to provide some subtle barbs for those who refused to sing his hymns: “Let those refuse to sing who never knew our God; But children of the heavenly king may speak their joys abroad.” This hymn first appeared in Watts’ *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707) and was titled then “Heavenly Joy on Earth.”

Still today there exists a controversy within the church regarding the use of traditional versus contemporary sacred music. Although we may each have a preference, cultural differences such as this should never be allowed to disrupt the unity of the church. In the words of St. Augustine: “Let there be in the essentials, unity. In all non-essentials, liberty. In all things, charity.”

Determine to follow the suggestion of this hymn: “Let our joys (and not minor differences) be known and thus surround the throne.” Rejoice in the truth that the best is yet to come in “fairer worlds on high.”

*Jack Martin*

## *Once He Came in Blessing*

**1** Once he came in blessing,  
All our ills redressing;  
came in likeness lowly,  
Son of God most holy;  
bore the cross to save us,  
hope and freedom gave us.

**2** Still he comes within us,  
still his voice would win us  
from the sins that hurt us;  
would to Truth convert us:  
not in torment hold us,  
but in love enfold us.

**3** Thus if thou canst name him,  
not ashamed to claim him,  
but wilt trust him boldly,  
nor dost love him coldly,  
he will then receive thee,  
heal thee, and forgive thee.

**4** One who thus endureth  
bright reward secureth.  
Come then, O Lord Jesus,  
from our sins release us;  
let us here confess thee,  
till in heaven we bless thee.

Hymnal 1982 #53



**Friday, December 4, 2020**

God's Son is Coming is the translation of this hymn which was first published in 1531. While not as familiar as many Advent hymns, many of the words seem very appropriate for this time in our lives when it is so easy to be anxious about our future. The first verse simply, but powerfully states that Christ came in blessing to redress our ills, to save us and give us hope and freedom. In verse 2 his voice wins us from our sins which hurt us and verse three exhorts us to love him boldly.

In this time of a pandemic, we definitely need hope. Hope can come through faith as we love him boldly. In Chapter 10 of *The Holy Longing*, Ronald Rolheiser states that personal faith comes through prayer and that "Only prayer can provide...that fine line (spiritual, psychological, and emotional) between depression and inflation." He also speaks of the need for Christian community and the transforming power of our rituals.

Yes, God's Son is coming. Yes, God's son is here now to redress our ills, to save us when we confess with true contrition, to give us hope and freedom as we love him boldly.

*Michelle Weller*



*Redeemer of the Nations, Come*

**1** Reveal your-self in virgin birth,  
The birth which ages all adore,  
a wondrous birth, befitting God.

**2** . From human will you do not spring,  
but from the spirit from our God;  
O word of God, come; take our flesh  
and grow as child in Mary's womb.

**3**. You came forth from the eternal God,  
and you returned to that same force.  
You suffered death harrowed death,  
and reigned once more from God' high throne.

**4**. With God the Father you are one,  
and one with us in human flesh.  
Oh, fill our weak and dying frame  
With Godly strength which never fails.

**5**. Your cradle shines with glory's light;  
it splendor pierces all our gloom,  
Our faith reflects those radiant beams;  
No night shall over come it now.

**6**. All praise, O unbegotten God.  
all praise to you, eternal Word,  
all praise, life giving Spirit, praise,  
all glory to our God Triune.

**Saturday, December 5, 2020**

This hymn, attributed to St. Ambrose of Milan (340-397), expresses the liminality of Advent. There are so many ways in which we are in-between at this time. We worship a savior who is wholly God and wholly man. We await the coming of one who has been here already. Secular culture tells us we should be singing songs about reindeer and silver bells and Christmas trees, while we look forward to singing carols about a poor child born in a stable whose coming will change everything. Secular culture tells us we should be decorating, shopping, partying and traveling, while our hearts tell us this is a time to be still and contemplate the coming of the savior of world. It's easy to skip the waiting and jump right into the celebrations, but, then, what are we celebrating? A god who loves us enough to take on our flesh, to suffer what we suffer, to live as we live, to die as we die? Or just one more excuse to buy stuff, eat good food and enjoy each other's company? This Advent, be still. Breathe. Pray. Wait.

*The Rev. Glenda Hardin, Deacon*

*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.