

Advent Season Adult Forum
Faith Lutheran Church
December 7, 2014

Jeff Crosby, Facilitator

Introduction

Paying Attention During Advent: The Portals of Literature, Music and Art

“From the simplest lyric to the most complex novel and densest drama, literature is asking us to pay attention. Pay attention to the frog. Pay attention to the west wind. Pay attention to the boy on the raft, the lady in the tower, the old man on the train. In sum, pay attention to the world and all that dwells therein and thereby learn at last to pay attention to yourself and all that dwells therein.”

Frederick Buechner, *Whistling in the Dark*

Next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world.

Attributed to Martin Luther

“Art enables us to find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time.”

Thomas Merton, *No Man Is An Island*

- “My First Advent,” a meditation from Nadia Bolz-Weber
- “The Night of the Child” by Robert Benson (reading)
 - Images from The Upper Room Museum, Nashville, Tennessee
- Readings:
 - *A Reading from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “The Turning Around of All Things”*
 - *A Reading from Madeleine L’Engle, “The Irrational Season”*
 - *A Poetry Reading from Luci Shaw, “Mary’s Song”*
 - *A Poetry Reading from Mark Noll, “Born to Raise the Sons of Earth”*
 - *A Reading from Meister Eckhart, “Christ in Our Time”*
 - *A Reading from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “God is in the Manger”*
 - *A Reading from Walter Wangerin, Jr., “Christmas Day: Our Door to the Nativity”*

- A Contemplative Vision of Rembrandt's *The Adoration of the Shepherds*, set to "All is Well"
 - Read the text from Luke 2:8-18 quietly, on your own
 - Dwell on the Rembrandt image, considering:
 - What effect (if any) does dwelling on this piece have on you?
 - What do you see that is familiar?
 - What about this portrayal of The Nativity seems unique? A touch that you've perhaps not considered before?
 - How has – or how can - art, classic and contemporary, informed your Advent journeys past, or your Advent journeys future?

Luke 2:8-18 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Shepherds and the Angels

⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah,^[a] the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,^[b] praising God and saying,

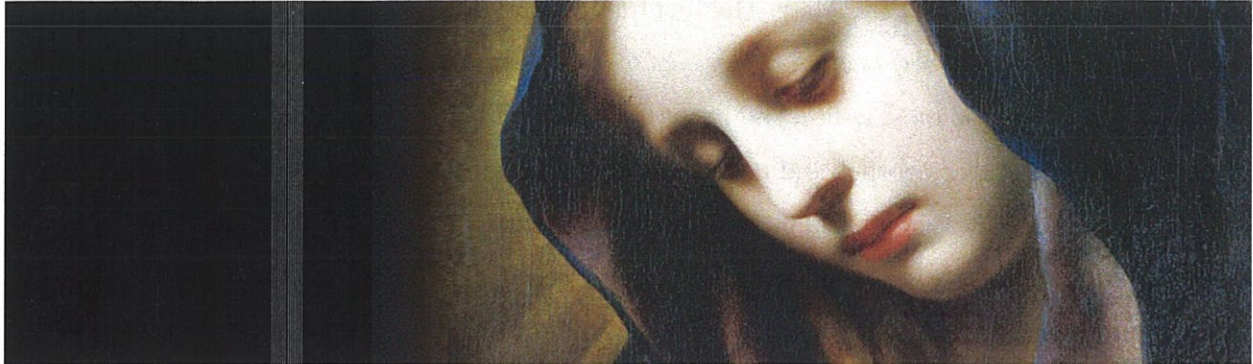
¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"^[c]

¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.

- Resources for Further Reading & Contemplation
- Closing in Prayer

“My First Advent”
By Nadia Bolz-Weber
November 29, 2014

Advent Adult Forum
Faith Lutheran Church
December 7, 2014



The first time I celebrated Advent I had no idea what was going on. I'd been married to a Lutheran seminary student for just a week when we moved to Eugene, Oregon, for his internship at a small, Lutheran church. United Lutheran sat on a little grassy hill in a neighborhood dotted with 1940 bungalows – one of which would serve as our one bedroom home for a year while Matthew tried out being pastor-y with a group of real live church-goers.

What I remember most about that Advent in 1996 was singing Vespers. I had never sung evening prayer before and all I knew of Vespers or Matins (morning prayer) was that monks and nuns in movies about medieval Europe had to keep a strict schedule of prayer. If they were late or disruptive, their stern Mother Superior (or whatever the monk version of that would be) would scold them and make them scrub the scullery floor. I'm unclear if this image came from *The Flying nun*, *The Name of the Rose*, the *Brother Cadfael Mysteries* on PBS, or the early scenes of the *Sound of Music*, but that was the extent of my knowledge. I really had no idea that people in modern times ever did things like pray Vespers or Matins, or that they did these things without having to wear robes and habits.

But Advent Vespers at United Lutheran Church in Eugene, Oregon was one of the most beautiful things I'd ever experienced. A small group, perhaps 20 of us, would gather at 7 p.m. on Wednesdays in the sanctuary of the church to sing our prayer. We all seemed to enter church by unwrapping our scarves as though needing the light and warmth of the Advent candles to warm the skin on our necks before we could relax enough to sit still. The greenery of the Advent wreath gleamed by the shifting light of the candles placed around the room. And there we gathered, in a silence particular to the time of year when the days are so, so short.

Recommended Advent Resources for Further Reading and Contemplation

Note: Many of these resources can be ordered by Jane Stroh at The Bookstore in Glen Ellyn, while others are available only in used copies sourced online or via libraries.

Books:

1. Baker, Sanna Anderson, editor, Christmas Readings to Recapture the Wonder of the Season, (Harold Shaw Publishers, 1995, 0-87788-131-6, out of print but used copies still available).
2. Barton, Ruth Haley, Advent Reflections: Revive, Restore, Reveal, (available at www.TransformingCenter.org, a ministry based at the Loretto Center in Wheaton, IL).
3. Benson, Robert, The Night of the Child, (Upper Room Books, 2001, 978-0835809481, used copies still available).
4. Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, The Mystery of the Holy Night, (Crossroad Publishing Group, 2nd Edition, 2014, 978-0824520243).
5. Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, God is in the Manger: Reflections on Advent and Christmas, (Westminster John Knox Press, 978-0664238872). *Note: Available in the Faith Lutheran Church Library!*
6. Card, Michael, The Promise: A Celebration of Christ's Birth (Sparrow Press, 1991, 978-0917143076, used copies still available online or new paperbacks at www.MichaelCard.com).
7. Dawn, Marva, Follow the Story (Creative Communications for the Parish, 1564 Fencorp Drive, Fenton, MO, 63026).
8. Harries, Richard, A Gallery of Reflections: The Nativity of Christ, (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995, 0-8028-3814-6, out of print but used copies are still available).
9. Heinz, Donald, Christmas: Festival of the Incarnation, (Fortress Press, 2010, 978-0800697334).
10. Hewitt, Garth, A Candle of Hope: A Journey through Advent, Christmas and the New Year to Bethlehem, (BRF/UK, 1999, 1-84101-041-3, out of print, used copies available online).
11. Kirk, Patty, The Gospel of Christmas: Reflections for Advent, (InterVarsity Press, 2013, 978-0830837854).
12. Moser, Johann M., editor, O Holy Night! Masterworks of Christmas Poetry (Sophia Institute Press, 1995, 0-918477-24-7, used and digital copies available).
13. Nouwen, Henri J.M., Advent and Christmas Wisdom from Henri J.M. Nouwen, (Liguori Publications, 2004, 978-0764812187).

14. Richard Rohr, Preparing for Christmas: Daily Meditations for Advent (Franciscan Media, 2008, 978-1-61636-478-6, \$8.00).
15. Various Authors (Madeleine L'Engle, Henri Nouwen, Kathleen Norris, Dietrich Bonhoeffer), Watch for the Light: Readings for Advent and Christmas (Orbis Books, 2001, 978-1-57075-541-5) - *Note: Available in the Faith Lutheran Church Library!*
16. Wangerin, Walter, The Manger is Empty: Stories in Time (HarperCollins, 1989, 978-0060611804). *Note: Available in the Faith Lutheran Church Library!*
17. Wangerin, Walter, Preparing for Jesus: Meditations on the Coming of Christ, Advent, Christmas and the Kingdom (Harper Collins, 1999, 978-0310206446).
18. Wolfe, Gregory, God With Us: Rediscovering the Meaning of Christmas, (Paraclete Press, 2007, 978-1557255419).

Music

1. "The Holly & the Ivy," performed by the Clare College Choir, Cambridge, England, under the direction of John Rutter (London Classical)
2. "Christmastide," recorded by Bob Bennett (iTunes or www.bobbennett.com).
3. "The Promise: A Celebration of Christmas," recorded by Michael Card (Sparrow Records)
4. "Chant Noel," recorded by the Benedictine Monks of Santo Domingo De Silos (Angel Records)
5. "James Taylor at Christmas," recorded by James Taylor (Columbia/Universal Music)
6. "Holiday Songs and Lullabies," recorded by Shawn Colvin (Columbia Records).

Permissions:

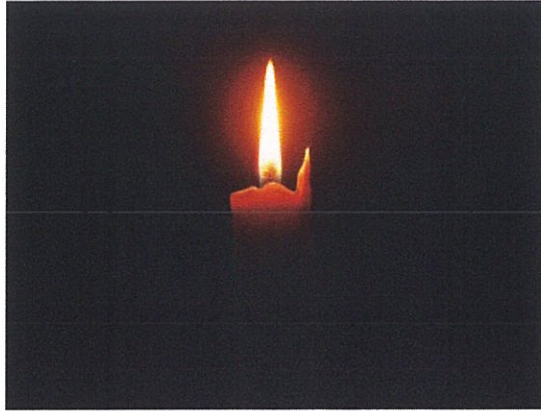
Projected visual and spoken selections from *The Night of the Child: Photographs from The Upper Room Museum Nativity Collection* by Robert Benson. ©2001 by Upper Room Books®. Used by permission from Upper Room Books®.

Rembrandt's *Adoration of the Shepherds* is in the public domain. Excerpted from Richard Harries' *The Nativity of Christ: A Gallery of Reflections* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1995).

Song and poem "Snow," from Jeff Johnson's "Centerpoint: Poetry & Music for Christmas," © 1991, Sparrow/StarSong Music. Music by Jeff Johnson; poem by Keith Patman and read by Dallas McKennon.



"Adoration of the Shepherds," Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (Dutch, 1606-1669), oil on canvas, 1646



A Prayer for Advent

O God, from the heart of Bethlehem
From the heart of occupied land
You have sent a message
To shake the world
Thank you for the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem
That gives so many clues as to your character
In the birth of this child we discover a spirituality
Of hope, peace, justice
Thank you that a child born in simplicity
Amongst a poor community
Speaks of the values of the way of peace
Thank you that you are a God of the poor
The marginalized
Those for whom there is no room
And that's why this is a way of life and a theology
That gives such hope
Because no one is forgotten
May we hear the call
And live out the lifestyle
That helps to build a community
That reflects this alternative way
Of a loving God
A community of justice
That asserts simplicity
Humility
And the worth of every human being
Thank you that you are a humble, generous God
Who stopped to show us the way of love

Garth Hewitt, author of *Occupied Territories: The Revolution of Love from Bethlehem to the Ends of the Earth*
(InterVarsity Press, 2014)

Faith Lutheran Church
Advent Adult Forum
December 7, 2014

A Reading from Meister Eckhart

“Saint Augustine says this birth is always happening. But if it does not happen in me, what does it profit me? What matters is that it shall happen in me. . . .

“This, then, is the saying of the wise man: “While all things were wrapped in peaceful silence . . . a secret word leapt down from heaven, out of the royal throne, to me.’ . . .

“What God is doing in the core of my soul is hidden from me and that is a great benefit. Since the soul itself does not know, it wonders and, wondering, it seeks, for the soul knows very well that something is afoot, even though it does not know how or what. . . . St. John says:

'The light shone in the darkness. It came unto its own. And to as many as received it, to them power was given to become the Sons of God.' . . .

“In view of this, you ought to put an end to all your [outward] efforts, silence all your faculties, and then you will really discover this birth [of God’s Son] in yourself. If you will find him who is born king, pass by everything else you might find and leave it behind. That we may pass by and leave behind all that is not pleasing to this king, may he help us, who therefore became the child of man that we might become the children of God. Amen.”

Faith Lutheran Church
Advent Adult Forum
December 7, 2014

A Poetry Reading: Born to Raise the Sons of Earth
By Mark Noll

I am busy, Jesus,
ever faster screeching round and round –
You lie calmly in the manger,
Joseph's patient voice the only sound.

I am selfish, Jesus,
grasping, pulling inward, curved in tight –
You stoop lower, ever lower,
Mixing spittle for a poor man's sight.

I am sated, Jesus,
stuffed so full I've almost lost my breath –
You are rasping, breathing labored,
stumbling naked, famished to your death.

I am tired, Jesus,
numb and finished, callous and distressed –
You stand wounded, weeping, dying,
quickened; calling, "Come to me and rest."

Faith Lutheran Church
Advent Adult Forum
December 7, 2014

A Poetry Reading: Mary's Song by Luci Shaw

Blue homespun and the bend of my breast
keep warm this small hot naked star
fallen to my arms. (Rest ...
you who have had so far to come.)
Now nearness satisfies
the body of God sweetly. Quiet he lies
whose vigor hurled a universe. He sleeps
whose eyelids have not closed before.
His breath (so slight it seems
no breath at all) once ruffled the dark deeps
to sprout a world. Charmed by doves' voices,
the whisper of straw, he dreams,
hearing no music from his other spheres.
Breath, mouth, ears, eyes
he is curtailed who overflowed all skies,
all years. Older than eternity, now he
is new. Now native to earth as I am, nailed
to my poor planet, caught
that I might be free, blind in my womb
to know my darkness ended,
brought to this birth for me to be new-born,
and for him to see me mended
I must see him torn.

Faith Lutheran Church
Advent Adult Forum
December 7, 2014

A Reading from Madeleine L'Engle

“This is the irrational season
When love blooms bright and wild.
Had Mary been filled with reason
There'd have been no room for the child.”

Faith Lutheran Church
Advent Adult Forum
December 7, 2014

A Poetry Reading: “The Turning Around of All Things”
By Dietrich Bonhoeffer

We are talking about the birth of a child,
Not the revolutionary act of a strong man,
Not the breathtaking discovery of a sage,
Not the pious act of a saint.
It really passes all understanding: The birth of a child
Is to bring the great turning around of all things,
Is to bring salvation and redemption to the whole human race.
What kings and statesmen, philosophers and artists,
Founders of religions and moral teachers vainly strive for,
Now comes about through a newborn child.