



in translation
cultivating kingdom language

volume 1, issue 2 | December 2019 | *preparation*

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Cover and this page:
Advent, Max Adams, 2018

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Vision and Preparation

by the Reverend Fabien Pering

I often have a momentary vision

of running through deep canyons in the heat of a summer day. I don't ever hear music in the background of these visions like might be portrayed in a Hollywood film. I just hear the rhythm of my feet striking the sandy ground and feel the relaxed breathing as I run along the empty trails of that canyon. There are never any crowds or people cheering me on, just a simple and unknown runner wandering through the desert canyon. I don't see anything 'extra' on me other than a hat, shorts, and a pair of dusty running shoes. – This vision is interesting because I have never run in this kind of setting before. However, these momentary visions keep me interested in preparing for the time that I find myself in a canyon.

There's something alluring to the visions that we have of ourselves. You might not be into running, but we *are all* interested in something that captures our entire imagination. That something invades our thoughts and keeps us working towards whatever it is we see ourselves doing in these visions. It's important to have these visions because they guide our preparation in one direction. The preparation is never easy but it is necessary because it produces humility in us. We recognize in our humility that what we're striving for is never a sole effort but carried on the shoulders of our family and friends. We're filled with gratitude for those who helped push us along the way to help you attain that momentary vision. The same can be said of the Christian life. Seeing God face-to-face in the beatific vision is what guides our preparation in this life. The ineffable light of life is what all people seek. We seek that place where there are no shadows or deception. We long for that place where we are fully known and loved without shame or guilt. We hope for that place to sit in the presence of the Alpha and Omega while smelling the burning of incense and listening to the choirs of angels and archangels. This momentary vision captures our imagination and guides our preparation in due season.

We are to prepare for such a vision as this by prayer and fasting. This world offers competing visions of the good life if you buy 'this' or 'that.' It wants to sell experiences so that you feel whole and makes you feel like you need to look a certain way. All these things lead to death. We fast so that we don't give in to the way of death. We pray so that we can have enough strength to not be the reed broken in the wind. Praying and fasting isn't taking anything away but rather adding true value and meaning to an otherwise valueless and meaningless life.¹

This preparation is hard but it produces in us humility and endurance. We are to look to those who have gone before us and follow after their example. "Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run the race with endurance set before us,"² that we can *welcome* the King of Heaven, and see Him face-to-face.

¹Orthodox Church, "Orthodox Answers-If someone asks you why you don't fast." Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=suhtmk_n120&t=227s

²Hebrews 12:1

Preparing for Death: Living by the Gifts of God

by the Reverend Colby Truesdale

As a hospice chaplain, I witness the dying of others on a weekly basis. For those Christian sisters and brothers with whom I'm afforded the honor of accompanying on their journey into—or rather through—death, I have observed, in part, what I believe to be the Christian art of dying. By “art” I do not mean “beauty,” but rather that a Christian death is a death that will take practice and preparation. From the deathbed, it appears the practices that prepare one for a distinctly Christian death are the practices of a Christian life. Put differently, Christian discipleship leads to a death that can rightly be called Christian. As readers of the New Testament, our discipleship is connected to our death, our Christian living to our Christian dying, need not come as a surprise. To begin, in the Gospels, when Christ beckons would-be followers of him to the path of discipleship, he bids them to come and die: “Take up your cross.” Death and discipleship, at the outset, are unequivocally linked.

The soil that will make possible our Christian death is presently cultivated in our daily life. This does not mean, however, that one is unable to die a Christian death because they lived a life in willful disobedience, arriving to a realization of God's grace and charity in their final hours. In these circumstances, which are numerous from my experience as a chaplain, the imminent reality of death becomes so terrifyingly certain to the dying that they are graciously disabused of the illusion they are in control of their life and capable of willing their own existence. In these hours, the converted dying are in awe of the pure givenness of life and the realization that their entire existence has only and always ever been made possible by the generosity and charity of God. Often at this point, the dying re-remember their lives through the eyes of faith, and are comfortingly convinced that “God was here the whole time yet I did not know it” (Genesis 28:16).

This grace is afforded to the dying every day, and it is the same grace that is presently afforded to the pupil of Christ. It is the gracious revelation of the God-givenness of our existence, whereby we understand we do not control, secure or grasp for our being, just as Christ in his divinity “did not count equality with God as something to be grasped” (Philippians 2:6). Rather, we live by “every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4), knowing “every good and perfect gift is from above” (James 1:17). We live a life believing a “person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given them from heaven” (John 3:27). Christ's cruciform call to discipleship compels us to come to terms with our mortality, and the inability of securing our existence.

A life that lives consciously aware of the givenness of their life and the reality that their life is made possible only by the gifts of God is a life of grace. This is the life of a disciple. This is a life that can enter into death, precisely because it enters the reality and possibility of death every time it chooses to love an enemy, give alms to the poor, or pray for daily bread. These Christian acts are intelligible only to the extent one knows their life is secured, not by control, money or power, but by the gifts of God.

In Christ's church, the sacraments shape us in the God-givenness of our life. In this regard, Christian tradition has never accepted the practice of self-baptism. This is because baptism—as a sacrament—is a gift, a grace; it is something to be received, something done to you and for you. It is not at your disposal or control. Likewise, in the Eucharist we hold our hands opened in a posture of receiving, precisely because the life of God—and mysteriously our life by union with God—can only be received as a gift. A sacramental life is a life lived by means of gifts. Through the practices of discipleship and receiving the sacraments, we prepare our lives for the moment of our death, knowing and believing that even death does not undo the gifts of God.

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Boisterous Grid: An Interview with Max Adams

Parishioner Max Adams is a graphic artist exploring the relationships between low and high tech media, motion and time. He created a series of watercolor grids for Redeemer Anglican Church corresponding to the liturgical seasons. This interview was conducted by Anna Richarde in West Asheville, NC, October, 2019.

So our focus here is on these four watercolors you made for the church. But first let's hear some background on you as an artist. Your discipline as an artist is very inspiring to me, especially as you're working full time elsewhere. Let's hear about your weekly practice and how you've made it possible.

[I work] a 4 day work week – 10 hour shifts each day. So that created an opportunity for me to do studio days on Friday. So 8 hours every Friday and occasionally mid-week after work I might draw for an hour or two. And then most every Saturday and Sunday between 4 and 8 hours each.

Does a Friday (or Saturday, Sunday) ever roll around where you don't feel like sitting down to draw? What do you tell yourself?

Yeah, no not really. I am always really eager to get in the studio, and I don't really sleep in.

Was that always the case?

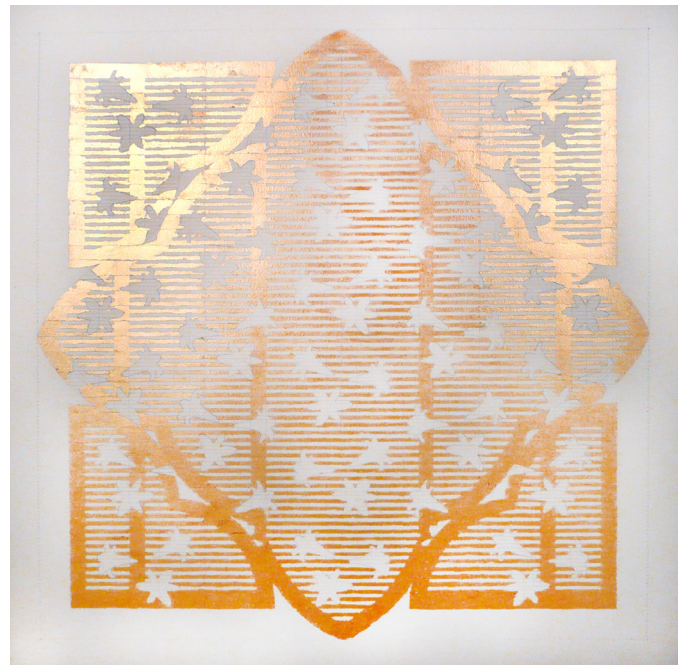
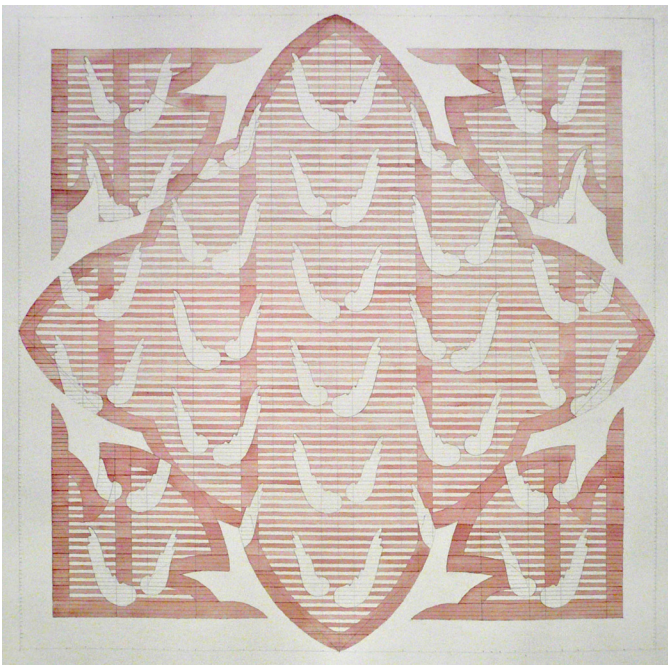
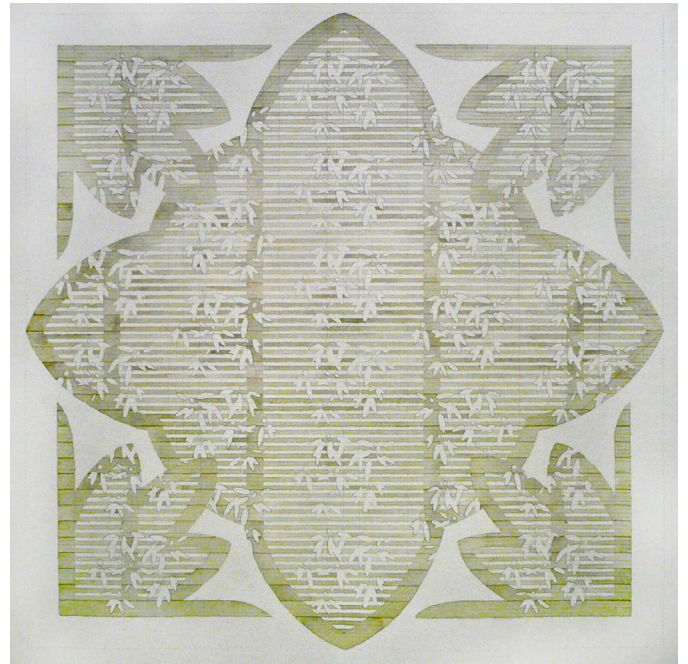
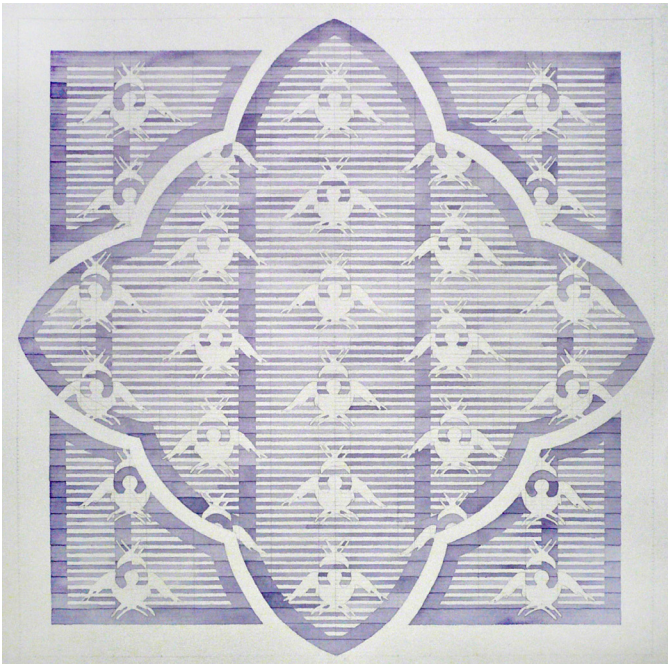
No, there was a season after college where I didn't know how to start projects or what to do even if I had the time, and it wasn't until I moved here and I had a month and a half without work and with free rent and utilities while house-sitting for this couple that I had day after day, 8 hours straight, where I could work on a project. Out of that process, I learned a lot of the discipline of getting in the studio and also the excitement of seeing a big project through start to finish. And also seeing the evolution of ideas and the accountability to pursue new projects that come out of starting one – you can see all these branches growing on the tree, and it's like, what direction do you want to continue based on all the information gathered or experience gathered for the project at hand?

Where does inspiration come from, for you? Do you think "inspiration" is even necessary as a start for a project, or do you sometimes need to just sit down and do the work?

There's definitely a case for sitting down and doing the work, but at least in my experience, once I did that, then the inspiration came kind of effortlessly, as long as I was faithful to recording my experience along the way. So having a sketchbook and taking notes, writing alternative options, and having a curiosity to actually tweak whatever I've done and see if the result is better taken from another angle. But also I will read an art history textbook every year and expose myself to new people and influences, and that usually starts the ball rolling too, where I can see similarities between artists, and differences, and want to try my hand at something that I've seen. So I mean, actually studying it is part of inspiration for me and does have a huge impact on how I operate.

Does there often come a point in a project where you grow bored of it, given that your work is so rigorous and detail oriented?

For sure. A lot of my drawings are layers of graphite built up...it's not really defining a form as much as just filling it in, and so it's just this repetitive action that can take me



Clockwise from top-left:
Advent, 2018
Ordinary Time, 2018
Easter, 2019
Pentecost, 2019

hours at a time, and then I'll repeat that across multiple frames, so it's just repeating layers of darkness or something – dark tonality. And yeah. That gets kind of mind-numbing. But I really like the result, so I am more happy to have that result and be a little bored than not have that result.

So, let's talk about these four watercolors you made for the church. They are, if I'm not mistaken, on the left of the doors as you walk in the sanctuary. Tell us how the pieces came about – what was the specific commission?

Gary had specifically asked me to make posters or images for the different church calendar seasons. And the larger project came out of a request for an Advent poster, and so that actually informs all of them... I think Gary specifically had wanted something preparatory to give a cue, a visual marker, to people entering the church as to where we are and where our hearts should be, I guess. So it was a visual cue of what to expect and anticipate.

How long does each of these watercolors typically take you?

Maybe the first one was an extra day or two because I was designing it, and once it was designed I could repeat that pattern pretty easy with the variants. But, yeah...maybe four or five eight-hour days each.

Where did the unifying pattern come from?

The motif for the first one was just trying to think about the church seasons and not wanting to be too figurative...feeling like that would kind of limit what was designed to be a preparatory artwork to draw people into the shift and prepare them for the sanctuary. So I thought something more abstract would be more conducive to that – people could kind of bring their own histories to it. [I was] specifically thinking about Advent, thinking about that season and the preparatory or anticipatory nature of Advent and the calling towards something. And I was thinking about the choir of angels with the shepherds as well as these pre-nativity scenes with the star and the wise men and sort of these moments with these signs and meetings in which people were called to Christ and their vision was pointed in a specific direction. So the idea of that star kind of came out of that.

And I had been looking at some prints of William Blake's, and he had this cool nativity print in which the barn, the gabled barn roof, has this kind of arched quality to it and I thought...if I took that and flipped it, the arched gable was effectively like an eight-pointed star. I liked the sculptural quality of William Blake's work, and so I had already decided upon an abstract approach to the piece. So yeah, geometry and form were a big part of it. So that's where the star shape comes from. And the center is the star being a symbol of being called to something or looking towards or pursuing something in the nature of Advent. And then if the end goal is Christ or this kind of nativity moment, kind of shaping the star like a barn or something like that.

So yeah, then there's the other thing of an eight-pointed star. So the Christian church doesn't really have much of a symbol for what the star is, it kind of changes a lot. Whereas it's actually more of a Hindu or Islamic star and shape – the eight-pointed star, but it is this very religious symbol and architectural symbol...I was looking at church architecture and church art, even non-Christian with the Islamic or Hindu pattern and design-based work and it doesn't have a fixed meaning as much as it encourages engagement.

I was thinking about the choir of angels with the shepherds as well as these pre-nativity scenes with the star and the wise men and sort of these moments with these signs and meetings in which people were called to Christ and their vision was pointed in a specific direction.

The general design is also taken from this artist in Detroit, Janet Hamrick, who I saw when I was living at home, at the Detroit Institute of Arts. She had these really cool watercolor designs where it was these ribbons or strips and then kind of negative space images beneath it... it deals with perception and looking towards something, and background and foreground – changing focus.

Which season does each watercolor correspond to, and how do the elements of each watercolor speak to that season?

So, I talked about Advent already, and purple being the color of the season. And then I was trying to represent the choir of angels hearkening, or calling our attention to Christ, so that's where I pulled the negative space motif from. I was looking at Byzantine iconography and looking at Seraphim, and their cool bizarre graphic, which I distilled it to an outline. And also they kind of look like eyeballs, so again sight and perception and focus. So that was the first one.

And then Ordinary Time is green, thinking about growth; and I think there's a lot of floral plant imagery associated with the season, so I tried to take a local approach and do a rhododendron motif with the leaves as an abstract pattern. And then changing the four-corner pieces to reflect that as well, being more herbaceous or whatever.

And then the third one I did was Pentecost. And I was thinking about the flaming tongues, tongues of fire, and also the descending of the Holy Spirit as a dove ...the image was somewhere between wings as the Holy Spirit is depicted, but also the second depiction as flaming tongues or balls of fire or something. Also a lot of the coming of the Lord is this boisterous scene, and there were a lot of images I was looking at from the Renaissance of an angel with a trumpet in the clouds, and so it's also reminiscent of a trumpet or a bugle or something, announcing the descending of God.

The last one is Eastertide, Christmastide, so gold is the color there. And it's a lily motif, which is an Easter symbol.

Max's work can be found on his website maxladams.com.

Consumerism, Community & Communion

by Jonathan Atkinson

A

dvant is a penitential season meant to foster longing and anticipation in its participants. Our liturgy shifts its tone in order to heighten our awareness of our own brokenness and need for the coming savior. Advent is often marked by simplicity and fasting. This is a stark contrast to the busyness and excess that characterizes popular culture during the holidays.

The strange evolution of the holiday season from a communal time of thanksgiving and charity to a celebration of consumerism is increasingly apparent. Retail events like Black Friday and Cyber Monday have essentially become holidays in their own right. The cultural pastime of clipping coupons, immediately after a meal meant to remind us to be thankful for what we have, exposes the normalization of a disordered societal trend.

Individuals are increasingly defined by what and how we consume. Our purchasing habits are an extension of our personality, a way to signal to the world who we are and what we value. Therefore, our identities are intrinsically connected to the production and consumption of products in a way that would likely seem strange to generations past.

Further, participation in the economy is seen not only as a responsibility but a patriotic act. *In The System of Objects*, Philosopher Jean Baudrillard, notes

...modern consumers spontaneously embrace and accept the unending constraint that is imposed on them. They buy so that society can continue to produce, this so that they can continue to work, and this in turn so that they can pay for what they have bought.

Baudrillard goes on to quote advertising slogans noted by Vance Packard in his 1957 book *The Waste Makers*. “Buy days mean paydays - and paydays mean better days!”; “Buy now - the job you may save may be your own!”; “Buy your way to prosperity.” While modern ad campaigns are often more subtle, individuals are still subject to a constant stream of advertising meant to convince us that happiness is just a purchase away. How then do Christians go about navigating these competing

cultural narratives? Are we to be pious scrooges that scold everyone for their participation in a system that markets dissatisfaction? Perhaps Advent offers us another way forward.

By learning contentment, even in the midst of longing and pain, the church is cultivating a community that can offer rest to those who are exhausted by contemporary life. Theologian, William T. Cavanaugh, puts it this way in *Being Consumed*:

Consumerism is a restless spirit that is never content with any particular material thing. In this sense, consumerism has some affinities with Christian asceticism, which counsels a certain detachment from material things. The difference is that, in consumerism, detachment continually moves us from one product to another, whereas in Christian life, asceticism is a means to a greater attachment to God and to other people. We are consumers in the Eucharist, but in consuming the body of Christ we are transformed into the body of Christ, drawn into the divine life in communion with other people. We consume in the Eucharist, but we are thereby consumed by God.

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In other words, Christians are given an opportunity to participate in a reality that redefines and redeems what it means to consume. In the Eucharist, what we consume, consumes us—and transforms us into Christ’s image. This is true of both the individual and the collective. All believers are welcome at the table regardless of social status, political perspective or any other social cue that functions to alienate us from one another. This is more than a mere acceptance of those unlike ourselves because they affirm a common set of beliefs. What happens during commu-

nion is a transcendent reality that fundamentally changes who we are and who we are in relation to one another. In being made one with Christ we are made one with each other.

In turn, Advent, allows us to more fully appreciate the implications of our common meal and common life. By resisting the distraction of habitual consumption and instant gratification, we are nourishing in ourselves a sure and certain hope of the resurrection. Our temporary anticipation of our Lord’s birth prepares us to confidently and patiently wait for the rebirth of all things.



This Joy Repairs

by Dr. Elizabeth Juckett

i.

Around 6 PM, night falls abruptly and completely in the Mien village, as it does everywhere near the equator. In our bamboo house, rituals of bedtime begin. Three little Coxes in handmade wooden beds recite their Scripture memory verses, listen to a chapter of C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*, pray together, and eventually fall asleep by the flicker of a kerosene lamp as our Dad sings bedtime hymns to us in his high quavery tenor—"The Day Thou Gavest Lord is Ended," "Hushed Was the Evening Hymn"—hymns to make the darkness holy.

Outside, the darkness is menacing. Thick jungle surrounds us. Hungry tigers prowl the perimeter of the village, hoping for some small creature to devour. At night the Mien people worship and placate dark spirits with animal sacrifices, magic rituals, and "spirit money" to protect them from diseases, accidents, poor harvests, all the miseries of life. Bondage to these malign spirits makes life bleak for women who toil in the fields all day, their babies tied to their backs, then come back to the village and cook meals, make clothes for their families, do all the work of the home. Bleak too for men, crossbow hunters, spirit priests, opium addicts who lounge while the women work. In the darkness outside, screams and howls compete with the hymns of the night.

Against this bleakness, our parents, missionaries first in China, now in north Thailand, want to set a table of joy and celebration. But as our neighbors burn their spirit shelves, get baptized in a nearby river, learn to read from the gospel of John, form a small church, it takes a lot of faith in Jesus to give up the bondage of fear, to believe that God is more powerful to heal than malign spirits to destroy.

How to model the joy of Christ to the Mien? Our dad becomes, uncharacteristically, a party-planner, almost every church season an opportunity for joy and fun. The church gets decorated on December 23rd with paper streamers and balloons celebrating Jesus's birthday. After the Christmas Eve service, cake is served and we play old-fashioned party games: Pin the Tail on the Donkey, Blind Man's Bluff. On Christmas day, the whole village feasts, sitting outside in the sunlight at low bamboo tables, not only the daily portion of rice to eat in round china bowls, but spicy pork fat too, and an array of chicken and vegetable dishes. And as we feast, God sets a table of celebration for all of us. Darkness will fall again, our hearts will harden; but today the light of Christ fills the village, a moment of grace.

ii.

Fast forward thirty years, and little Elizabeth Cox has become an adult broken-hearted by the separations and abandonments of her life as a missionary kid. Too much darkness, too much disappointment with God, too much Christian meanness have left my head theologically correct but my heart a stone. Shaking my fist at silent heaven, I give God four Thursday evenings in November and December to show up, the span of a Life in the Spirit seminar, or I am done with Christianity. "I'm tired of having my loyalty repaid with pain, tired of being wounded by Your followers, tired of trying to understand the capricious cruelties in my life. If You're real, show me," I challenge.

On the final Thursday, we make our confessions, say Evening Prayer together. Nothing. With holy hands laid on bowed heads, our rector and his wife offer prayers for visitation by God's Holy Spirit. Nothing. Hands are lifted, gifts of tongues exercised. Nothing. Cynical, but disappointed, I give up. I get up from the altar and start to exit through the sacristy. It is all as I expected. But then in the darkness, God's holy joy falls upon me and I begin to laugh and laugh, emptied of myself and as full of God as my narrow heart will hold. This Advent and every Advent after, God sets a table for me in the wilderness; my darkness has turned to light.

iii.

from "The Nativity of Christ"

*O dying souls! Behold your living spring!
O dazzled eyes! Behold your sun of grace!
Dull ears attend what word this word doth bring!
Up, heavy hearts, with joy your joy embrace!
From death, from dark, from deafness, from despairs,
This life, this light, this word, this joy repairs.*

*Gift better than Himself God doth not know,
Gift better than his God no man can see;
This gift doth here the giver given bestow,
Gift to this gift let each receiver be:
God is my gift, Himself He freely gave me,
God's gift am I, and none but God shall have me.*

Robert Southwell (1561-1595)





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