

2009 Christmas Special Offering

WORSHIP RESOURCES “O Come, All You Faithful”

CALL TO WORSHIP

Let us pray:

Grant, Birthing Lord, that we, who rejoice in celebrating the mysteries of the nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, might hear again the song of the angels, and respond with a song in our hearts—

might know again the wonder of the shepherds, and respond with a glow in our eyes—

might experience again the marvel of this night, when animals see the newborn Lord, lying in their manger!

Let us worship God.

OFFERING MEDITATION

A regional minister was visiting one of the churches in his region one Sunday. In the sermon he had shared stories about the great things that God was doing beyond the doorsteps of that congregation. Following worship, during the coffee hour, he was visiting with the members who had come to worship that day. There was an obviously poor, elderly woman who handed him a crumpled, well-worn bill. She told him that it was for the ministry of the region. He almost replied, “My goodness no, you keep it, you...” Instead, he took it and expressed thanks.

Back in the car, as he prepared for the long drive home, he reflected on the incident. Truly it was not his place to refuse her gift for the church, however impractical her stewardship. Surely she found joy in her act of sacrificial giving.

Once again he had been privileged to experience a joyful faith – hers, then his, and now yours!

OFFERING PRAYER

Faithful God,

What a privilege is ours to give back to you that which you gave us. We thank you for the ways our lives have been blessed by your generosity. Now, we gladly return these tithes and offerings that we may partner with you and other Disciples in ministries that bring light to our dark world. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

PRAYERS FOR REGIONAL MINISTRY

Please join me in praying for the ministries of our regional church, responding “hear our prayer” after each petition:

We lift up our Regional Minister _____ as he/she walks with our churches through conflict and change. In your mercy Lord.

All: Hear our prayer.

We lift up new churches being founded and nurtured by the regional church. In your mercy Lord.

All: Hear our prayer.

We lift up those in our region who grant standing to our ministers, upholding our need for gifted, trustworthy leaders as pastors. In your mercy Lord.

All: Hear our prayer.

We lift up our regional staff who equip leaders for transformation and assist congregations in claiming their unique ministry. In your mercy Lord.

All: Hear our prayer.

We lift up those who participate in various ways as counselors, directors, chaplains and nurses in our regional camping ministry. We are grateful for their part in providing life-changing Christian camping experiences for children, youth and adults. In your mercy Lord.

All: Hear our prayer.

We lift up those congregations in search of a pastor, and for those in regional ministry who help guide this process of discernment. God, please guide them as they strive to meet the needs of our congregations and the candidates. In your mercy Lord.

All: Hear our prayer.

O God, we give you thanks for the great things that you are doing in our region. We are truly blessed by the ministry of all those who serve Christ through the ministries of our regional church and who challenge us to be Christ’s faithful people in this time and place. Strengthen us for the tasks you give us. We pray you and thank you now, in Christ’s name. Amen.

CHILDREN'S SERMON

(Instructions: Place a rough manger in the chancel area near where the Children's sermon will be shared. On pews drape strips of bright colored cloth about one inch wide and 15 inches long. Alternatively, these may be located in baskets near the center of the worship area. If there are only a small number of children, then after the children are through invite adults to come forward and add to the quilt effect)

As we approach Christmas, we buy presents in preparation to give our family, friends and neighbors. But how can we prepare to welcome Jesus who is at the heart of the season? The Bible tells us that when Jesus was born that his parents placed him in a manger, which was a place in a barn where the farm animals were fed.

We want to make this rough manger a comfortable place to lay a baby. Lets take some strips of cloth, and lay them on top of each other to form a patchwork quilt on which a baby could be laid. Go find a trip of cloth and gently lay it across the manger. As we do this I'd like the big people to sing "Away in a Manger"
(Chalice #147)

Now, let us be silent for a moment and turn our minds away from preparing for Christmas, to preparing for Jesus.

PRAYER: Dear God, bless all the dear children in thy tender care, and fit us for heaven to live with thee there. Amen.

CHRISTMAS EVE MEDITATION

December 24, 2009- Psalm 46

At Christmas, more than any other time, our hearts turn toward home so it is not surprising that one of the most beloved of the secular Christmas songs is "I'll Be Home for Christmas."

On the surface, this is a purely secular song. It doesn't say anything about Bethlehem, or the stable, or even Baby Jesus. But in another sense, this song is religious because the song is a prayer—a simple statement of one of the oldest needs of the human heart—the need to go home.

We all long to go home for Christmas. In one way or another, we are all trying to get home for Christmas.

But for tonight our true home is not Grandma's kitchen or the family farm or a suburban split level. Regardless of what is usually "home" for us, on this holy night, Bethlehem is our home. Indeed, in one sense it is the hometown of the whole world. Somehow, in the history of our planet, this obscure Middle

Eastern town has become a symbol of the human home. That is why all over the world tonight, in Sydney and Sao Paulo, in Lima and Lagos and London, in Bombay and even in the violent heart of Baghdad, people turn toward Bethlehem, and toward home.

Bethlehem stands for home—not a soft, silly, sentimental notion of home, but home in the face of homelessness and war and violence and separation and fear and all the other forces of darkness in our world. Bethlehem is our home because at Bethlehem God made his home with us.

Tonight we go home to Bethlehem for “this is where God is born, right here, in any cradle we will offer him, on any pile of straw we can pat together with our uncertain, hopeful hands.” (Barbara Brown Taylor, *Home by Another Way*, p. 24)

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