

## WORSHIP NOTES

*Fourth Sunday of Advent • December 18, 2011*

### **The Season**

Traditionally on this last Sunday of Advent we anticipate the Nativity of our Lord rather than the Second Coming. We listen again to words that stir hearts, and we contemplate the wonder of God's coming among us. It is a day to join Mary's joyful song of praise and hope as we anticipate God breaking into human history. It is a time to reflect on how we have responded to God's call, and what it might mean for us this year to tell out the greatness of the Lord and welcome the Christ child with joy. On this final Sunday of the season, we celebrate the miracle of faith. God starts with Mary, and continues on with us. Do not be afraid . . . God is with you.

### **In Word . . .**

As Advent concludes and Christmas approaches, our readings focus on God's surprises, God's resolve, and God's faithfulness. In our reading from Samuel, God does not choose the temple David wants to build, but promises to establish David's house (a line of kings to follow him). Our psalm recalls God's promises to the house of David, and the promise of an everlasting covenant. The second reading is the concluding doxology of Paul's letter to the Romans. It is a summary of his faith that God has a plan for the universe, that this plan is revealed in Christ, and that the plan is coming to completion. These readings lead us to our Gospel text which is the annunciation to Mary. Mary is presented as an example of faithful discipleship, trusting God, and doing what must be done to make God's will a reality. In the verses that follow our pericope (Luke 1:46-55) Mary goes on to sing that this is not something new God is doing, but a fulfillment of all that God has promised. Our readings on this day remind us that God's promise is fulfilled not in buildings or in great kings, but rather in those, like Mary, who in the midst of turmoil and confusion trust in God's promises. It is never the right time, and we are never ready . . . there are other things to do and places to be . . . but once we, like Mary, can say, "Here am I, the servant the Lord," the path opens before us. We can trust that even in this fallen and flawed world, God's word of hope is true, and we sing it "from generation to generation."

### **And Song . . .**

#### **Traditional (9:00)**

"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" is one of the oldest Advent hymns (Latin, 9<sup>th</sup> Century). Its verses are paraphrases of the O Antiphons; seven different titles for the Messiah from Hebrew Scripture, traditionally sung on the seven days prior to Christmas Eve (December 17-23). The sequence moves from the beginning, before creation (Wisdom) to the gates of Bethlehem (Emmanuel – God with us). The first letter in the titles given to Jesus forms an acrostic in Latin, which when read backwards means: "I will be tomorrow" ("Ero Cras"). Around the twelfth century the antiphons were collected into a Latin verse hymn, later translated by John Mason Neale. The tune, VENI EMMANUEL, is often cited as a "melody from a French Missal in the National Library, Lisbon," but is now thought to have been arranged by Thomas Helmore from various *Kyrie* chant melodies.

#### **Contemporary (10:30)**

Throughout the season of Advent we have been singing "Christ, Circle Round Us" as the candles on the Advent Wreath are lit. The verses of this song are paraphrases of the O Antiphons; seven different titles for the Messiah drawn from Hebrew Scripture, traditionally sung on the seven days prior to Christmas Eve (December 17-23). The sequence moves from the beginning, before creation (Wisdom) to the gates of Bethlehem (God with us), presenting a "mosaic" of the Old Testament: O Sapientia (Wisdom); O Adonai (Lord); O Radix Jesse (Root of Jesse); O Clavis David (Key of David); O Oriens (Dayspring); O Rex gentium (King of the Nations); O Emmanuel (God-with-Us). The first letter in the titles given to Jesus forms an acrostic in Latin, which when read backwards means: "I will be tomorrow" ("Ero Cras"). Dan Schutte's tune is based on *Salve Regina*, a Gregorian chant from the Middle Ages; dated by some as far back as the 11<sup>th</sup> century.