

CAROL OF UKRAINE ■ CHRISTMAS STITCHES ■ BIRDS IN FLIGHT + ON FOOT
RECIPES YULE LOVE ■ FIELDS + FLOODS ■ FLOWERS FOR HOURS
LOOKING FOR LIGHT ■ ...AND MUCH, MUCH MORE. *THIS IS VISUAL HYMNAL.*



visual hymnal

ISSUE NO. 4

CHRISTMASTIDE

Note From the Editor

Since January, we’ve released four issues exploring the themes of Epiphany, Eastertide, Ordinary Time, and now Christmastide. Reflecting on one year of Visual Hymnal, I am filled with wonder and gratitude for the opportunity to make something like this, and for the kindness of this community in encouraging and supporting it.

While doing our Thanksgiving grocery shopping, I was reminded of a movie I first saw probably fifteen years ago: the 1987 Danish film “Babette’s Feast.” (Spoilers ahead!) Based on a short story by Isak Dinesen (aka Karen Blixen), the film is about a political refugee from France who is taken in by two kindly Norwegian sisters, leaders of a Protestant religious sect founded by their late father and known for its piety and asceticism. Babette lives with the sisters, Martine and Filippa (named for Martin Luther and Phillip Melancthon, for our Reformation enthusiasts) for twelve years, serving as their housekeeper and cook. When she unexpectedly comes into a large sum of money, she prevails upon the sisters to allow her to prepare a lavish French feast for them and the members of their dwindling community, commemorating their father’s 100th birthday. Out of care for Babette, Martine and Filippa reluctantly agree.

Initially, the indulgence-averse dinner guests vow to pay as little attention to the gourmet fare as possible. But over plates of potage a la tortue and cailles en sarcophage (and Veuve Clicquot champagne, which they mistake for sparkling lemonade), they begin to open up to one another in ways they never have over their usual meals of split cod and brown ale-bread soup. Old rifts are mended; broken relationships are restored. The feast—a marriage of the spiritual and sensory—gives rise to laughter and love. Toward the end of the night, one of the guests offers a toast, declaring that “mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and bliss shall kiss one another.”

I didn’t really understand this film when I watched it years ago, but I think I’m finally starting to. Gifts—both the costly kind we shop for and the creative kind we cultivate—are meaningful, transformative, and meant to be shared.

Babette, the sisters learn after all the guests have gone home, was once the head chef at a famous Parisian restaurant. Martine and Filippa are shocked when she tells them she has spent her entire fortune to make this feast for them. But Babette explains that it wasn’t only for them. She quotes a character from earlier in the story: “Throughout the world sounds one long cry from the heart of the artist: Give me the chance to do my very best.”

Over the past year, you all have brought your very best to Visual Hymnal. You have born mercy and truth to one another in story and song, pottery and plants, photos and fabric and yes, food. You have donated to this project and told others about it. With each new issue, I am astonished at the gifts God has showered on this community and amazed at what He enables us to create together.

Merry Christmas, friends, and Happy Feasting.

Katie Hautamaki

VISUAL HYMNAL

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Contributing Artists

Ellen Sanders is from Franklin, Tennessee and is studying social work at FSU. She has been drawing, painting, and crafting for her entire life and is excited to share her work.

Jennifer Drury is a sinner loved by Jesus, thankful for her amazing husband, sweet kids, and great jobs, both as a homeschooler and a classical teacher. She loves truth, goodness, and beauty in many forms, from sunsets to poems to water molecules.

Nancy Main is a wife, mother of three, and grandmother of five. A retired nurse, she has lived in Tallahassee for 37 years and been a Christian for more than 50. She is a member of Four Oaks Church East.

Mike Houghton has been drawing since he was a kid in Miami. Among his favorite sources of inspiration is exploring Florida’s wild and natural beauty with his family.

Kelly Jackson is married to Caroline; father to Nora, Johnny, Annie, Isaac, and Maggie; and has always loved words and the sounds that make them. He is glad to contribute his acrostic piece and hopes it blesses your Advent season and reminds you of the coming of our King.

Eli Myhre is a creative writing student at Florida State, originally from Tallahassee. He comes from a family of artists and has found writing to be one of the best ways to connect with others, himself, and his faith. He has never gotten over the beauty of Jesus, and is glad he never will.

Kim Houghton is wife to Mike and mom to four kids ranging in age from 18 to 27. When not writing for her day job, she enjoys reading, cooking for friends and family, and taking long walks in nature.

Contributing Artists, *continued...*

Mara Eller is a writer, editor, teacher, and coach with a passion for transforming pain into purpose through the power of story. She lives in Tallahassee with her husband of 16 years and three young daughters. You can find her at maraeller.com or subscribe to her newsletter One True Sentence on Substack.

Catherine Miller is a singer-songwriter, writer, and pianist. Catherine met Henry in college and they started writing songs together. Three kids, two cats, a dog, and fifteen years later, they claim they do their best work together. Catherine has her master's in Worship Studies from The Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies in Jacksonville, Florida.

Henry Miller is a poet, writer, and father of three rambunctious boys. He enjoys Nerf battles, Wendell Berry, and agri-ventures with his family. Fun fact: he proposed to Catherine with a sonnet.

Sophie Gardner is a fourth grade student who loves gymnastics, track, soccer, piano, traveling, and art.

Esther Gardner is a sixth grade student who values her privacy.

Tara Gardner loves her husband and three children, even if she is the only one who laughs at her jokes. She voted herself most likely to passionately recommend a book she hasn't actually finished reading yet. She loves the process of making art. She finds editing much easier than writing.

Kateryna Ovcharenko is a dreamer on a quest, mother of three, wife of one, daughter of The One. She is a Ukrainian displaced by war, who has her place in God's kingdom.

Veronika Kulichenko is a high school sophomore and an unprofessional critic, born and raised in Kyiv, Ukraine. She hates her accent and loves pastries.

Danica Middlebrook has been stitching since she was a girl. She attended Center Point Church from 2022-2024 with her military family, and currently lives with two of her four kiddos in Annapolis, Maryland, where she teaches college students.

Amanda Allen is a mother of three girls and two dogs who all want to sneak a bite of whatever she is making.

Daniel Hautamaki works in the woods, raises three kids with his wife, has 17 hobbies (with a new one coming soon), and makes a mean eggnog.

Katie Hautamaki knows the words to every song from "The Muppet Christmas Carol." Editing this magazine brings her great joy.

Caroline Jackson, a Georgia native, longtime Christ-follower and amateur artist, is fueled by coffee and naps. She's trying to convince her six extroverted roommates (one husband and five young offspring) that the quieter things in life—time outside, books, more coffee, more naps—are the coolest things in life, too.

Justin Hughes serves Christ Classical Academy as Head of School, and he serves St. Peter's Anglican Cathedral as a deacon. He and his wife Allie have four children ages ten to fifteen.

Heather Sherman has gone dipnet fishing in Alaska, lived at 13,000 feet in Peru, eaten churros on a beach in Tijuana, and is very content with everyday life in Tallahassee, Florida.

Cody Sherman doesn't like mayonnaise or attention. But he has learned to tolerate small amounts of mayonnaise.

Kristin Webster is a mom, college instructor, wreath-maker, and mystery connoisseur. She enjoys Bible study and walks in the morning with her husband.

Karen Hawkins is a native Floridian who grew up in Panama City on beautiful St. Andrew Bay. She moved to Tallahassee in 2007 for an editing job at FSU. When she's not advocating for the Oxford comma, she can be found hanging with her cat Hamilton and quoting Shakespeare to anyone who will listen.

Abigail Davis is a fifth grader who loves to sing, dance, draw, and write. In her free time, you can find her shopping, organizing her room, reading, creating games, or making art.

Sara Davis grew up in the age of Left Behind vs. Harry Potter and, frankly, is still working through all that. Spoiled rotten by her husband, she enjoys homemaking, hosting dinner parties, and the more-than-occasional midday nap. Mom/Coach/CFO. Sometimes she designs magazines.

Verity Hawkes is a fourth grader with two brothers. She enjoys sewing, ballet, reading, and ukulele.

Shaun Davis is a husband, dad, and a mildly talented BBQ pitmaster. When he's not fighting the computers, he is out enjoying nature, where they can't control his thoughts. Sara believed he was a robot when she first met him. He recently convinced her he is not.

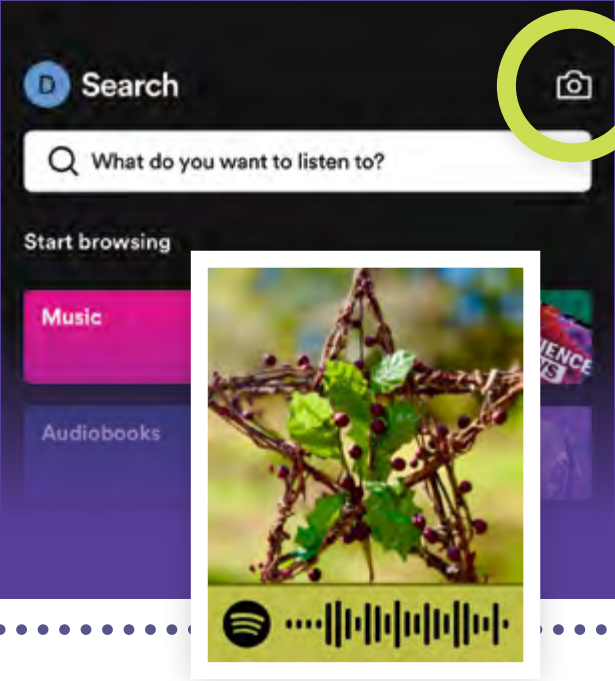
Lauren Gines loves Jesus, her family, and making beautiful things of all kinds.

Unto you a child is born!

A musical walk through
Advent and Christmastide

Curated by Daniel Hautamaki

Let's set the mood with some tunes. To play, go to the Spotify search bar, click on the camera next to it, and scan!



Come and See

Inspired by Psalm 66, this song came to us during a sabbatical that followed a long, challenging "wilderness" season where we were learning to trust God and what it means to follow him. Mentioned in the lyrics are Jairus, the father of the young girl Jesus raises from the dead (Luke 8:40-56, Mark 5:21-43), Jesus ("the Passover Lamb"), Thomas (John 20:24-29), and Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9, Isaiah 58:6, John 8:31-32).

Piano and Vocals: Catherine Miller
Guest Vocalist: Jennifer Nicholson
Violin: Megan Sahely
Viola: Sally Hernandez
Cello: Katie Troy
String Bass: Sammy James
Flute: Cheryl Cerreta
Flute: Karl Barton

Released October 18, 2024
Arranged by Catherine Miller
Recorded, mixed, and mastered in Valdosta, GA by Lee Dyess of EarthSounds Records.
Overdubs recorded by Chris Hall. Produced by JRiveMusic (BMI).



Fresh Snow '24

New Yuletide tunes released this season

Curated by Daniel Hautamaki

An Advent Call to Worship

Adapted from John 1

By Kristin Webster

Leader: In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God and the
Word was God.

All: He is the Alpha and Omega.

Leader: In him was life and that life was
the light of men.

All: He is the Light of the world.

Leader: He was in the world, and though the
world was made through him, the world did
not recognize him.

**All: He is the Lamb of God who takes
away the sins of the world.**

Leader: Yet to all who believed in his name,
he gave the right to become children of God.

All: He is the Resurrection and the Life.

Leader: We have seen his glory, the glory of the
one and only Son, who came from the Father,
full of grace and truth.

**All: He is the King of kings and Lord
of lords.**

Leader: Out of His abundance we have
received grace.

**All: He is our Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God, Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace. Come quickly, Lord
Jesus! Amen.**



Votive Candle Holders
Ceramic
Designed and built by Sara Davis
Glazed by Tara Gardner

*God Rest Ye
Merry, Gentlemen*



Arranged and performed
by Cody Sherman

Spiced Cranberry Sauce

By Amanda Allen

I love cranberries. We have some kind of cranberry dish every year for Christmas, like panna cotta with sugared cranberries, or a cranberry custard tart with fresh whipped cream. I just love how festive cranberries look on a holiday table.

My kids' favorite and most requested cranberry dish is my Spiced Cranberry Sauce. I found this recipe in the early 2000s—I can't remember where—and have made it countless times over the years. I usually serve it with turkey or pork, but my kids will eat bowls of it straight from the fridge.

Ingredients:

1 12-ounce bag of cranberries
1/2 cup water
1/2 cup granulated sugar
3/4 cup packed brown sugar
1/4 tsp ground ginger
1/8 tsp allspice
1/8 tsp cinnamon
1/2 tsp salt

Add all ingredients to a heavy 2-quart pot and stir to combine. Cover and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. You'll want to keep an eye on it. Once boiling, reduce heat to low and simmer for approximately 10 minutes or until cranberries are all popped. Allow to cool slightly before serving.

Sauce can be made several days in advance and stored in the refrigerator. Can be served cold, room temperature, or warmed.





Christmas Wreath 2024
Kristin Webster

Advent(us)

By Kelly Jackson

A Way from His Father Who
 Descended into hell-bent creation,
 Vagabond, virgin birth, Very God,
 Eternally Begotten, newly born,
 No longer singularly Spiritual.
 Time excitedly swells for its Creator, while the
 Un[st]able, Adamic, broken catch-22
 Sleeps, and the Answer looks up into His mother's eyes.

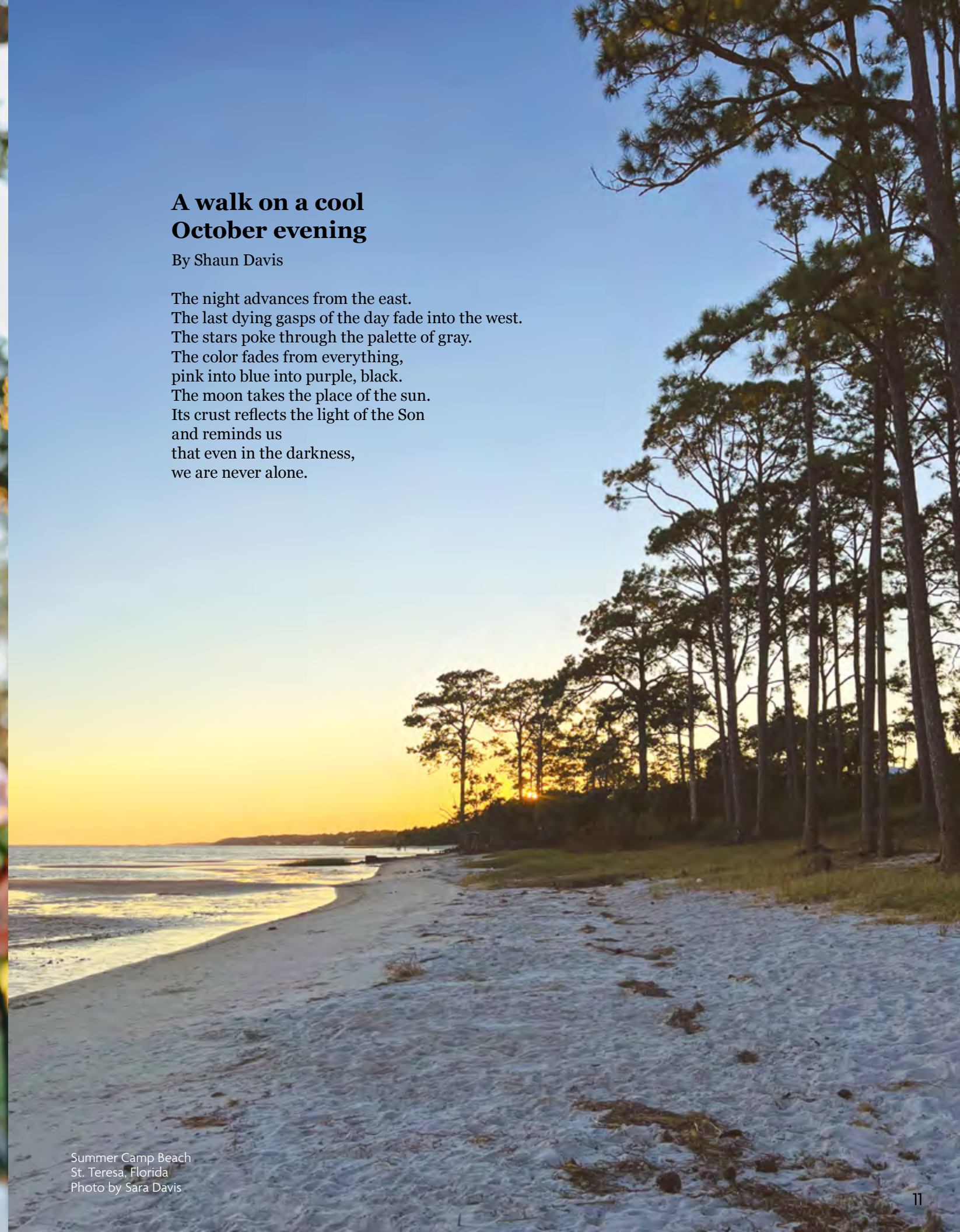


"Let Earth Receive Her King"
 Christmas Cross-Stitch
 Design from "She Reads Truth" 2017 Advent Study
 Stitched by Danica Middlebrook



Giant Paper Flower Installation
Crepe paper, PVC tubing, and concrete
Lauren Gines

Photo by
Jackson Alley



A walk on a cool October evening

By Shaun Davis

The night advances from the east.
The last dying gasps of the day fade into the west.
The stars poke through the palette of gray.
The color fades from everything,
pink into blue into purple, black.
The moon takes the place of the sun.
Its crust reflects the light of the Son
and reminds us
that even in the darkness,
we are never alone.

Summer Camp Beach
St. Teresa, Florida
Photo by Sara Davis



"New Jerusalem Descending"
(cover image)
Acrylic on canvas
Caroline Jackson, 2021



“Repeat the sounding joy”
The Gap of Dunloe
County Kerry, Ireland
Kaley Turner



Linocut print
Heather Sherman

Vespers in Feathers

By Cody Sherman

Fly across the ocean blue
Don the well-worn hiking shoe
Cross the tidal marsh, the moat
On foot, on bike, on bus, on boat

Crowds fill up the alleyways
Winding road, medieval maze
Michael stands above in gold
The serpent's foe in battle bold

With upward gaze, begin the search
For stairs that lead up to the church
Resting as a heavenly crown
Upon the peak of ancient town

Like Dante on celestial hill
Climbing higher, higher still
Past the crowds, the shops, the walls
To sky and clouds and seagull calls

The masses congregate below
Up above you'd hardly know
As footsteps find the final stairs
The clock strikes time for evening prayers

Mingling with the salty air
A sense that one should not be there
Tourist, uninvited, lowly
Hopeless to approach the holy

Monks enrobed, with soaring voice
Wind and ocean, song, rejoice
Meager traveler, sweat and dirt
Voice that rasps and feet that hurt

Having naught to offer here
It seems right to disappear
When flash of brown, plain and small
Flies into the sacred hall

No voice commands the bird to go
No hand swings out to strike a blow
They just allow the little flyer
To add her voice to the choir

Look how the birds up in the sky
Sow not, nor reap, they only fly
Your Father feeds them from above
Are you not worth much more, my love?

Shchedryk

By Kateryna Ovcharenko

*Hark how the bells
Sweet silver bells
All seem to say
Throw cares away*

Four distinctive notes—a simple melody recognized all around the world. What most of the world knows as “Carol of the Bells” has, in fact, Ukrainian origin. Its original title is “Shchedryk” (we’ll get to the meaning later on). It was written by Ukrainian composer Mykola Leontovych in 1910, based on the four-note chant of a Ukrainian folk song. It was first performed in Kyiv in 1916.

Sounds dry and formal, doesn’t it? But the story of “Shchedryk” has much more to it. And it’s my honor and privilege, as a Ukrainian, to share its depth, significance, and historical context with you.

Well, to begin with, I’d like to share something impressive about Ukrainian folk songs in general. Ukraine has the most folk songs of any country in the history of the world, with an estimated 15,500 songs in UNESCO’s archives, outnumbering the next country on the list—Italy—by almost 10,000 songs. So Mykola Leontovych was growing up amidst quite a variety of folk songs, an endless source of inspiration. Some of these Ukrainian folk songs are over 600 years old and have many variations.

*The people of a country
with such a long history
of constant fighting for
freedom simply have to
process their difficult
lives, struggles, and losses
through music.*

We have songs for every season and occasion, any part of the day, any milestone in human life, death, and afterlife, any ritual, any historical event or person. So, what category of folk songs does “Shchedryk” belong to? You wouldn’t believe it—the category is in fact called “shchedrivky!” The root of the word is translated from Ukrainian as “plentiful,” “abundant,” “generous.” These types of songs are performed only on a special occasion called Generous Evening (Shchedryi Vechir), celebrated on New Year’s Eve.

Traditionally, on that evening a group of youth, a mixed crowd of boys and girls, goes from house to house with a set of music, songs, and even games—a whole program wishing that particular household prosperity. They proclaim blessings to everyone present in the house in individual songs. Cattle and fruitful fields are wished to the head of the family, fertility to his wife, long years to the elderly, marriage to the unmarried, health to everyone, joy to the grieving, and so on and so forth. You can imagine that the crowd in the house is usually quite big, like several generations getting together for Thanksgiving in America. And everyone deserves a separate song of blessing; the whole process might take up to an hour! The group of “blessers” gets a generous reward at the end: they share some food at the festive table with the hosts, and receive a “to-go” set of hand pies, candy, and money (later distributed evenly among the group members).

Dear reader might think, “Oh, it reminds me of caroling!” But dear reader is wrong. Ukrainian folklore has a whole separate group of Christmas songs for Christmas Eve called “koliadky” (with equally remarkable traditions). Christianity came to our land officially in 988 A.D., so a large part of our musical legacy is tied to the Christian faith.

So what is “Shchedryk” about? First of all, it’s addressed to the head of the household, usually performed at the very beginning of the blessing ceremony. According to the song’s lyrics, a little swallow has flown in and begun chirping and summoning the host of the house with these words:

*Come out, come out, master,
look at the sheep pen—
there ewes have given birth
and little lambs were born.
All your goods are great,
you’ll get lots of money.
But money is really chaff,
you have a real treasure—
a beautiful wife with dark eyebrows.*

No silver bells in sight. A very practical and witty blessing.

The people of a country with such a long, difficult history of constant fighting for freedom simply have to process their difficult lives, struggles, and losses through music. Hence, the number of folk songs, dances, and instruments. Growing up in Soviet and post-Soviet Ukraine, I used to attend a local “musical school”—an intense extracurricular program with daily instrument lessons, singing in a choir, and studying music theory and history. I was constantly irritated by the fact that the majority of Ukrainian folk songs we heard, played, and sung (along with other music by Ukrainian composers) was in a minor key. Including “Shchedryk,” which our choir used to sing, me in the sopranos starting that very famous four-note theme. In minor key. Even fast, joyful, humorous songs or lullabies sounded sad to me because of the inevitable minor keys. Little did I know then about my own history—a Soviet child, born in the Ukrainian part of the USSR shortly before Ukraine finally gained its independence in 1991. The previous attempt at independence was almost 80 years prior, when one evil empire—russia—transformed into the even more horrible empire of the Soviet Union.

Even fast, joyful, humorous songs sounded sad to me because of the inevitable minor keys.



*Ukrainian composer Mykola Leontovych
Learn more at leontovychmuseum.org.ua/en/*

The cultural maturity of Ukrainian art was supposed to support its fight for independence.

And that brings me now to the historical context of Mykola Leontovych, “Shchedryk’s” composer himself. As I briefly mentioned, Leontovych was born and lived all his life in Ukraine. At that time Ukraine was officially just another province of the russian empire. If you are an artist in an empire, you have a choice. You can forget your origin and ethnicity, go to the big city, and speak and create in the one and only official language, gaining fame, acceptance, and support. Or you can study your “local provincial” culture, stay in your province, and remain unknown to the general public (let alone the world), with no support but often lots of persecutions (ranging from official prohibition of any printed materials in your language to literal imprisonment in Siberia and inevitable death). Do you understand now why Tchaikovsky, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky had their “finest hour” and became famous, but many talented artists of the oppressed nations in the russian empire didn’t stand a chance, and remain nameless till this very day?

Leontovych himself came from a lineage of priests, and was born to a very musical family in western Ukraine. Mykola Leontovych dedicated his life to music, working all over Ukraine, forming and conducting orchestras and choirs, composing music, collecting folk songs, teaching music, and collaborating with many prominent artists of that time. Despite the abundance of art, nothing Ukrainian had any chance of reaching a broader public.

But the empire’s world was changing. First, the russian revolution in 1905 brought some civil rights and cultural autonomy for Ukraine. Next blow: the First World War (1914–1918) shook the whole of Eurasia like nothing that had come before. While the world was shaking, the empire was literally falling apart. Another revolution in 1917 killed the monarchy and installed a republic. Ukraine desperately tried to free itself from russia and other “friendly” neighbors, at one point uniting all lands under one independent country, but eventually after many battles was swallowed by what we now know as the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) in 1922.

Digital collage
Veronika Kulichenko

During those turbulent years of World War I, revolutions, and major changes in geopolitics, the first version of “Shchedryk” appeared. Mykola Leontovych wrote it in 1910, perfecting and rearranging his creation over the next ten years. “Shchedryk” was first performed in 1916, on the stage of Kyiv University. The world was transforming, the grasp of the empire weakening, and the Ukrainian art community finally had a real chance to step out of the shadow of promoted imperial culture and show the world the beauty and uniqueness of Ukraine. The Ukrainian National Chorus was a part of that cultural diplomacy (which also meant a lot politically), first touring Europe in 1919, and eventually covering many countries on three continents, giving over 600 concerts in the following five years. And “Shchedryk” took a special place in their program, as an acapella song for a mixed four-voice choir. The European press called Leontovych “the Homer of music” and praised the performances. On American soil, “Shchedryk” premiered in 1922 to a sold-out audience at Carnegie Hall, and the American audience loved it! The world tour of the Chorus was a huge success. The cultural maturity of Ukrainian art was supposed to support its fight for independence.

While the Chorus was touring the world, Ukraine was struggling. Political and military instability, attacks on multiple fronts, and a fragile position in international affairs made preserving the state’s independence extremely challenging. Bolsheviks repressed Ukrainian political and cultural activists, many of whom lived in survival mode, including Mykola Leontovych, who returned to his native town with his wife and two daughters to stay with his father.

One year before “Shchedryk” became a sensation in America, receiving standing ovations, its creator Mykola Leontovych was murdered by a russian secret service agent in Ukraine.

Some of the other Ukrainian songs from that tour also found their places in arrangements by George Gershwin and Robert Nathaniel Dett. And “Shchedryk” took on new life in the U.S. in Peter Wilhousky’s 1936 arrangement with English lyrics. That’s what we now know as “Carol of the Bells.”

*Christmas is here
Bringing good cheer
To young and old
Meek and the bold*

So yes, Christmas is almost here, bringing good cheer. And we cheer not because life is not difficult. In fact, it sucks sometimes. But our joy is rooted in Christ Jesus. His “good cheer” surpasses all human logic and understanding.

I hope this Christmas season, when you hear the sad minor key of “Carol of the Bells” in “Home Alone,” you’ll think of “Shchedryk,” the Ukrainian song of blessing. And pray for Ukraine, extending your blessing on my country, standing with me in the spiritual battle for saved lives, freedom, victory, and peace.

I hope this Christmas season, when you hear the sad minor key of “Carol of the Bells” in “Home Alone,” you’ll think of “Shchedryk,” the Ukrainian song of blessing.



Digital collage
Veronika Kulichenko



Cesky Krumlov, Czechia



Innsbruck, Austria



Elmelunde Church, Denmark

"Looking forward to the light"
Photos by Ellen Sanders

SIGNS OF CHANGE

By Kim Houghton

I am walking the yard in search of signs. The turf is browning. Helicopter seeds from a nearby maple spin and drop weightless in a litter of fallen leaves. In my hand I turn a freshly cut blanket flower, one of the few remnants of color. Its delicate petals, orange with a yellow hem, droop like a crestfallen child, as though it knows as much as I do a season has ended.

The children have grown and scattered like the little helicopter seeds at my feet. With them has gone much of the energy and color of this place. I glue two flowers to my canvas, one in bloom, one faded—a relic of former days.

Every sunset edges us closer to winter now. Daylight hours dwindle. Night lengthens its arms, reaching to embrace us in darkness. I am tempted to brace myself for the season ahead.

I close my eyes and turn toward the sun. Its heat is not as intense this time of year, but it is still warm on my face. I wiggle my toes in grass that is covered in acorns and will soon be dormant. I imagine what might be happening below, beneath the surface of this hallowed ground.

In his book “The Hidden Life of Trees,” Peter Wohlleben reflects on the “complex life that busies itself under our feet.” According to the German forester and educator, “up to half the biomass of a forest is hidden in this lower story ... There are more life forms in a handful of forest soil than there are people on the planet.” These soil microbes help to stimulate growth. With the right soil conditions, a single acorn from a live oak might grow to be 60-feet tall with a canopy twice its height. Buried in soil, the half-inch seed waits. Hidden in darkness, it listens. When its Creator signals, the miracle begins: Life unfurls. The seed sprouts. Roots form, laying a structure strong enough to sustain life above ground.

I know this miracle. I know it in my bones, and I am grateful for these signs of change and growth. I arrange acorns into a three-petaled flower, fixing them in time with tacky glue. In this season, I will wait. I will watch for His signal, expectant for the kinds of miracles that happen in the dark.



IN THIS
SEASON,
I WILL WAIT.
I WILL
WATCH FOR
HIS SIGNAL,
EXPECTANT
FOR THE
KINDS OF
MIRACLES
THAT HAPPEN
IN THE DARK.

Collage by Kim Houghton

The Mirthful MILKMAN

& Other Musings Over the Making of a Yule Log

By Katie Hautamaki and Nancy Main

My whole life, my mom has made this yule log cake at Christmas (and occasionally at other times, by special request). It is everything my family appreciates most in a dessert—chocolate and more chocolate—with the added artistry of the spiral shape and the interplay of the spongy cake and the decadent mousse.

In my earliest memories of it, the log is topped with a cheery garnish consisting of a halved maraschino cherry and green candied pineapple cut into leaves, arranged like a holly sprig, with a dusting of powdered sugar snow. In recent years, though, my mom has taken more of an “ain’t nobody got time for that” approach and skips straight to the powdered sugar, sifting it over the top just before serving.

Unlike many treasured family recipes, this one wasn’t passed down through generations. My grandmother never made it, nor did her mother before her. Instead, my mom came across it as a teenager while paging through her mother’s McCall’s magazine.

“I was probably fifteen,” she recalls. “It was in pictures that showed step-by-step how to do it. I thought, ‘I could try that.’ I tried it and it worked!”

I love this snapshot into my mom’s girlhood psyche, as well as the testament it is to the power of print—in this case, a 1970s women’s lifestyle magazine—to inform and inspire, even when we least expect it.

Recently, my mom kindly demonstrated the recipe while I documented the process in photos. What follows are excerpts from a rambling conversation over the whirring of her KitchenAid mixer.



KH: So you found this in McCall’s. Did Grandma get a lot of magazines?

NM: Yes, we got McCall’s and Ladies’ Home Journal, the two big ones back then. Redbook, we got that. And we got the newspaper.

KH: Which would have been the Atlanta Journal-Constitution?

NM: Yes, it came out twice a day. The Atlanta Constitution was the morning paper and the Journal was the evening paper. We’d get the morning paper; it would be there with the milk bottles.

KH: So would you have to be home in the morning, to bring in the milk and put it in the refrigerator?

NM: Well, it got there early, like 6:00 or 6:30 in the morning, so generally it was there when we got up. There was one time when the weather was really cold—it was below freezing. For some reason, [the milkman] was delayed getting there, and everybody had left, and it froze and busted the glass bottles.

Snuffy, our dog, would sleep outside, and the milkman would try to sneak up there and set the bottles down without waking up the dog, because if the dog woke up he started barking. Snuffy slept in this little fold-up outdoor chair. And so the milkman would try to put the bottles down quietly, but of course they clink. One morning Mom heard the milkman just laughing out there, because when he woke Snuffy up, Snuffy was so startled that as he scrambled out of the chair, the chair collapsed on him, and he went out of the chair and into his water bowl. The milkman thought that was really, really funny.

...

KH: There is a lot of beating involved in this recipe—you beat the egg whites, then the yolks. Does the weather affect how this turns out?

NM: Yes. If it’s raining, humid, your egg whites will not want to whip up. That’s when Aunt Sue and I both—because Aunt Sue makes the meringue kisses—we both have to turn the air conditioning on in December to get the house dry. There was one time I think I must’ve tried three times to get the eggs to beat up, and threw out two of the three.

KH: I wonder if some of these meringue recipes weren’t developed in Florida.

NM: Probably not!

...

KH: So once you discovered this recipe, you started making it every holiday?

NM: Yes, I did it for Christmas. I remember my mom asked me to make it one time when she was going to Uncle Henry and Aunt Betty’s house. I did it for youth group events.

KH: Did anyone else in your house ever make it?

NM: No. In fact, there have been times at Christmas when I’ve thought, “It would be nice if someone else knew how to do this!”



Yule Log

Originally from McCall's
Made for decades by Nancy Main

Ingredients

For Cake:

6 egg whites
6 egg yolks
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup unsweetened cocoa
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon vanilla extract
Dash salt
Crisco shortening (for greasing pan)
Confectioners' sugar

For Filling:

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chilled heavy cream
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup confectioners' sugar
(or to taste)
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup unsweetened cocoa
2 teaspoons instant coffee
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Let egg whites warm for one hour to room temperature.

Grease bottom of 15 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 1 jelly roll pan. Line pan with waxed paper; grease lightly. Preheat oven to 375.

Beat egg whites at high speed until soft peaks form. Add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of sugar, two teaspoons at a time, beating until stiff peaks form.

With same beaters in a different bowl, beat yolks at high speed, adding remaining $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar, two teaspoons at a time. Beat until mixture is very thick, about four minutes. At low speed, beat in cocoa, vanilla, and salt just until smooth. (It helps to drape a tea towel over the mixer to keep the cocoa powder from flying out.)

With a wire whisk or rubber scraper, use an under and over motion to gently fold cocoa mixture into egg whites, just until blended. Spread evenly in pan. Bake 15 minutes, just until surface springs back to touch.

Sift confectioners' sugar in a 15x10 inch rectangle on clean linen towel. Turn cake out onto sugar. Peel off waxed paper (slowly and carefully so as not to tear cake). Roll cake up jelly roll fashion, towel and all, starting at short end. Cool seam side down at least one hour.

To make the filling, combine all ingredients and beat until thick. Taste and add more confectioners' sugar if needed. Refrigerate.

Unroll cooled cake. Spread filling to one inch from edge; reroll.

Place seam side down on plate. Cover loosely with foil. Refrigerate one hour. Sift confectioners' sugar over cake just before serving.

An Advent Read

Each Advent I read W. H. Auden's long-form poem "For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio." This personal tradition began at the recommendation of a pastor several years ago and is now shared by a small group of friends. I find Auden's meditation on faith, loss, darkness, anxious waiting, and hope a fitting reminder that in Advent we live, as scholar and editor Alan Jacobs writes, "poised, as it were, on a cusp, with Before and After falling off on either side of the moment."* The poem is epic, challenging, lifting up and crushing down, much like the sacred story it draws from. Its setting toggles between the modern world (of 1944, that is) and the biblical one, where familiar figures of the Nativity (angels, shepherds, wise men, Mary, Joseph) surprise us with the kinds of stanzas that linger long after reading them. My favorite lines come close to the end—I hope that you will read through to them, and let me know that you did.

— Daniel Hautamaki

**The Princeton University Press edition (2013), edited by Jacobs and featuring his invaluable introduction, is the version I like best.*





World-making

By Justin Hughes

The two of us, like ten-year-olds,
raised the corners of the sheet in the air
and pulled them down over us, creating
a new world in the old, a world we knew
wouldn't last. But, like ten-year-olds,
we gave no thought to the world's end.
We didn't wonder what was outside our world,
and we didn't ask why we were in the world.
We found the world lovely, and we found
each other lovely. We were grateful
to have the world with the other in it.
By that time, the sheet collapsed on us.

"Golden Hour Lesson" ft. Rachael and Petunia
The Stables at Buck Lake, Tallahassee, Florida
Photo by Sara Davis

Coffee Table Stain

By Eli Myhre

I sit in my favorite room of my house, the living room, and my eyes are drawn to the centerpiece of the room: the coffee table. This old sturdy mahogany wood table is a pillar in my household. Passed down from my parents, and one of them got it from their parents, who probably got it from their parents. While this table is structurally sound, on the surface of it lies a large cup stain. When I say my eyes are drawn to the table, I mean my eyes are drawn to the stain. I don't know when the stain appeared, or who the culprit was. But there is something comforting about it. Each time I stare at it, it looks different—never the same shape, never the same color, but always there.

I imagine the many possible occasions during which the stain may have arrived. The truly hundreds of dinner parties, watch parties, small get-togethers, big celebrations, and somber meetings. The flood of the past makes me grateful for the stain. Intricate to look at, and strangely always changing, it serves as a portal. A portal to memories, moments, conversations, and people. Even what I do not remember lives with me. I can see family and friends together, in community. I hear laughs and see faces of those still here and those passed on. All who left their cups on the table because they were too focused on the people they were with to worry about leaving a stain. They weren't at the house to admire the furniture, the decor, or anything else. They were in the house for the people who were inside it—for the laughs, the joy, even the difficult conversations. They were there to be with one another. I think about those voices, voices I miss and wish to hear again. Faces I want to see beam with laughter. Eyes that were vulnerable, in joy or pain. Loved ones who trusted me enough to show exactly who they were. There were no transactions and no conditions. We simply talked about our own stains.

To put it in one word, when I gaze at the coffee table stain, I see fellowship. While I wish to see those faces and hear those voices, I do not wish to go back in time. Those faces and voices have all made their way into who I am. All of it a divine gift. There were no accidents; not even the stain. We all crave true fellowship, we all yearn to be truly seen and truly known, and where we experience that becomes a special place. I am blessed to have experienced that in the home I grew up in. I know for many this is not the case. I think instead of trying to gain blessings, I should try and be one myself. The coffee table stain doesn't just help me remember the past. It helps me think for the future.

There were no transactions and no conditions. We simply talked about our own stains.



Avenir Llama Sewing Kit
Project and photo by Verity Hawkes, 9



“The Holly and the Ivy”
Colored pencil and ink on paper
Sophie Gardner, 9



“Almost”
Linocut print
Tara Gardner

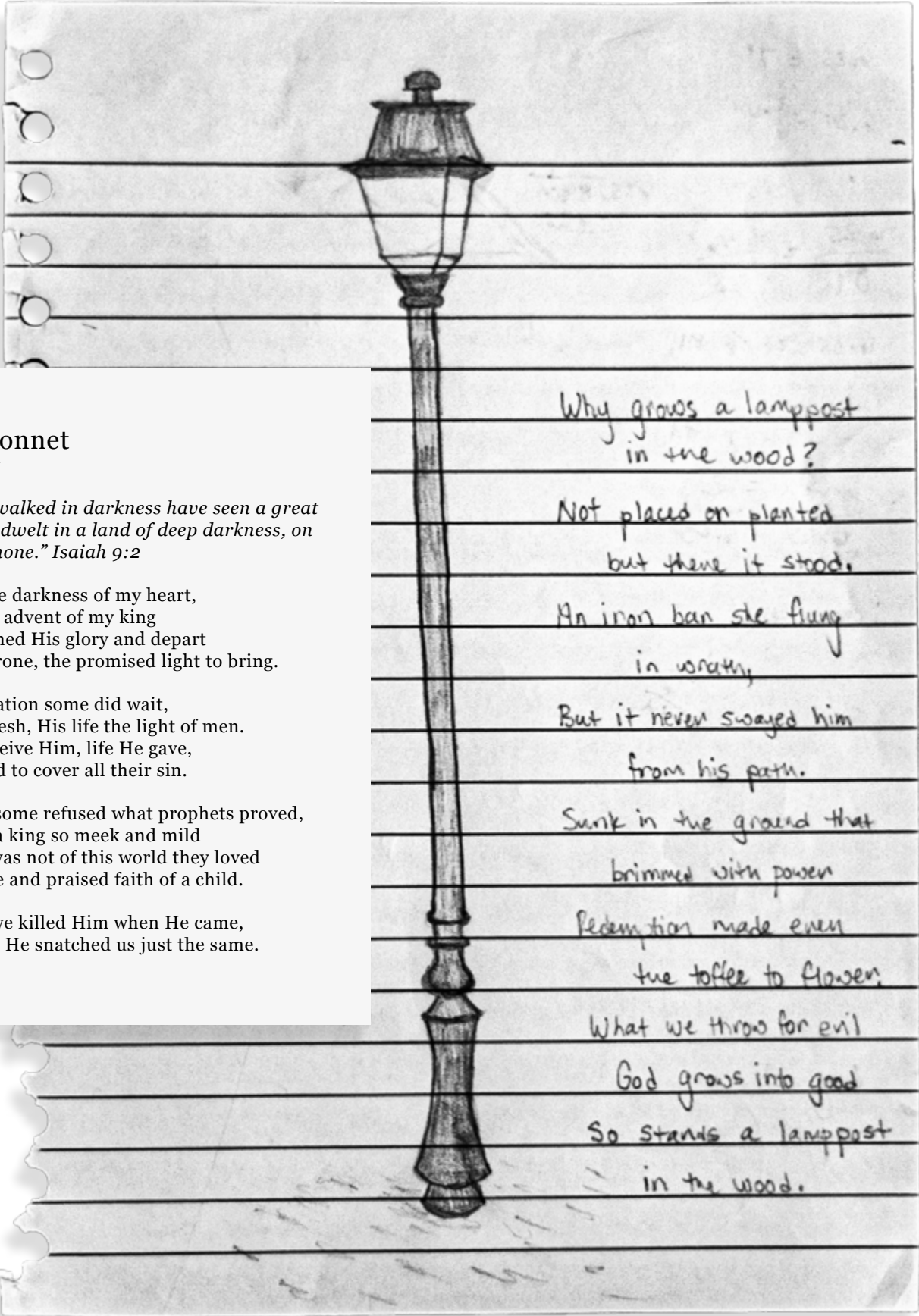


“Penguins”
Linocut print
Modeled after a print from “Animalium Poster Book”
by Katie Scott and Jenny Broom
Esther Gardner, 11



My brother Mark took a photo of this dog lying down beside a trail in the mountains at the edge of Seoul. The dog seems to me to be waiting for someone.

“Waiting”
Water-soluble graphite on paper
Mike Houghton



An Advent Sonnet

By Jennifer Drury

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.” Isaiah 9:2

Should I forget the darkness of my heart,
Remind me of the advent of my king
Who deigned to shed His glory and depart
From heaven’s throne, the promised light to bring.

In hopeful expectation some did wait,
For Word made flesh, His life the light of men.
To all who did receive Him, life He gave,
His gracious blood to cover all their sin.

But stiff-necked, some refused what prophets proved,
They wanted not a king so meek and mild
Whose kingdom was not of this world they loved
Who came as babe and praised faith of a child.

Beloved by God, we killed Him when He came,
But from the mire He snatched us just the same.

Why grows a lamppost
in the wood?

Not placed or planted
but there it stood.

An iron bar she flung
in wrath,

But it never swayed him
from his path.

Sunk in the ground that
brimmed with power

Redemption made even
the toffee to flower.

What we throw for evil
God grows into good

So stands a lamppost
in the wood.

“Why Grows a Lamppost in the Wood?”
Poem and drawing inspired by C.S. Lewis
Jennifer Drury



With Mary We Behold Him

On Birth, Death, and the Miracle of Christmas

By Mara Eller

My perspective on Christmas has changed dramatically after having a baby (or three). I still love it: the twinkle lights, the carols, the sense of hunkering down during the long, dark nights, the joy of Christmas morning gift-giving. And of course, the reason for the season—the celebration of the miraculous incarnation of God, here with us, intimately present.

But the fact that Christ came in the form of a tiny, helpless human has taken on a different tone now that I’ve incubated, birthed, and cared for three tiny, helpless humans myself. The holiday has become much more complex and even bittersweet, the festive euphoria tinged with the wild wonder and sober joy that accompanies the miracle of new life—the staggering vulnerability and raw physicality of birth. For me, the Christmas season has become intimately tied to the experience of late pregnancy (Advent), labor (Christmas Eve), delivery (Christmas Day), and postpartum motherhood (the other eleven days of the Christmas season leading up to Epiphany).

I can’t help but wonder: How did Mary fare in those weeks and months following the birth of her first baby? And what might her experience have to teach us about both the meaning of Christmas and the path of a faithful Christ-follower?

In the Bible, the Christmas story begins with a young woman receiving a most unexpected calling: Mary’s visitation by the angel and her beautiful submission to that terrifying assignment. I love the moment of Mary and Elizabeth meeting during their pregnancies, Elizabeth’s baby leaping in greeting.

And then the grueling journey to Bethlehem, while Mary is nine months pregnant, possibly riding a donkey and sleeping on the ground at night. I wouldn’t wish that on my worst enemy! She is a warrior. When they finally arrive in Bethlehem, her labor has started. But they cannot find a room in which she can deliver.

From “Madonna and Child Enthroned with Four Saints”
c. 1240/1245
Tempera on panel
Margaritone d’Arezzo
Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington

They finally end up in some kind of animal shelter, and then the baby is born and they lay him in a manger and the shepherds see a star and the wise men come to bring gifts and this baby God is come. All creation rejoices.

But, wait ... what about Mary? How the heck is this first-time mama doing after her incredible ordeal? In the images, she’s standing or sitting beatifically next to the manger, seemingly unfazed, looking lovingly at her child and Savior.

And I’m sure that she did feel an unbelievable, overwhelming love for that little baby—the miracle that had grown inside her and now lay before her, breathing and gurgling and waving his little arms spasmodically. But I’m pretty sure she would also have felt exhausted, sore, bewildered, and probably a bit anxious. Can you imagine the pressure of having to raise the Son of God?

The song “Mary, Did You Know?” wonders if she realized then that her baby boy would one day walk on water, calm a storm with his hand, raise the dead, and eventually, become the perfect sacrificial lamb to redeem humanity. It explores the awe and confusion and immensity of her experience, having delivered a baby that would one day deliver us all. Adding that to the intense emotions of a normal postpartum experience cannot have made for an easy time.

*A mother is always healing
and growing and learning
anew how to hold close and
simultaneously let go.*

Becoming a mother involves a tiny death, a death of your former self that makes way for a rebirth. There’s a death in loving this new creature whose life is tied so intimately to your own that the incremental separation of the child growing to independence can be felt, at times, like a visceral tearing. In this sense, a mother is always postpartum, always healing and growing and learning anew how to hold close and simultaneously let go.

For Mary, the Christmas story included some version of this death and rebirth. It included physical and emotional depletion, the painful adjustment to the relentless demands of a newborn all while attempting to understand the new person she had become—the mother of God.

I wonder how she felt, what she learned, and how that experience changed her understanding of herself, her world, and her God? While the details remain a mystery, I think we can say with confidence that Mary’s Christmas story included sacrifice, foreshadowing the ultimate sacrifice that her sweet little baby would one day make on the cross. And this is not nothing.

Mary’s experience reminds us that, like her, in order to give life, we must die to ourselves. In so doing, we join Christ in the great Story that is told each year, each day, each minute: the story of Love.

And this, too, is a miracle.

Joyful Birth

By Abigail Davis, 10

The first heartbeat,
When you open your eyes,
I finally meet you,
Heaven dancing in the skies.



“The Virgin and Child,” c. 1490
Engraving on laid paper
Andrea Mantegna
Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington

Cover Image by Caroline Jackson



Visual Hymnal exists to celebrate the creative work of the people of Center Point Church and beyond. We are interested in exploring the intersection of Christian faith and creativity; we also just love seeing what our friends are making. Writing, visual art, music, pottery, sewing, crafting, cooking, gardening—we want to showcase it all.

We welcome submissions on any theme or topic. Our next issue will coincide with Eastertide; please send us your work by **February 14**.

Visual Hymnal is run and funded by a small staff of dedicated volunteers. Want to get involved or support this project? Email visualhymnal@gmail.com or talk to Leah, Sara, or Katie!

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