

CHRISTMASTIDE/WINTER:

a period of Festival: celebrating God's appearance

the wonder of Incarnation: the divine becoming flesh
in our midst

Emmanuel: God-with-us

Christ entering into the world & total involvement
in human life

a dazzling light of God shining in the world

a spectacular saving event

stillness/quietness of newly fallen snow

the humble hidden-ness of God with us in our poverty

a proclamation no longer limited to one particular nation
but announced for all, in every place & time

a birthday party: presents

wish lists

hospitality & good will towards all

children's smiles

messages of good cheer

a period of hidden gestation of all things

"A Shepherd's Play"

In many ways this play is a modern adaptation of the Wakefield Mystery Plays #12 & 13, but other than form and idea, the inspiration and thought are other directed in its purpose. The "shepherds" should be clothed simply in a black outfit and the hooded cloaks put on towards the end are to be multi-colored, floor length, and abundant in material. These cloaks are to be hidden from view in the center area in a pile, if possible the cloaks could be turned inside-out with a black inner lining.

The area is black, perhaps the suggestion of stars, no scener, #1 & #2 enter and go into place: #1 upper right & #2 lower left. #1 remains standing gazing at the stars & trying to keep warm. #2 is seated facing the audience head bowed in a huddled position for warmth.

#1: (pacing in small circles mumbling something to self as trying to keep warm...as speech begins is at a brisk pace.) It's cold, being alone...

it's not my fancy, but now it seems my lot.

This weather chills my bones & numbs my features
as I stand watch over these resting sheep.

So defenseless are they as they slumber

that I must guard them from the dangers of the dark,
as I force my eyes not to wander...

and so the chatter flows as I converse with myself
from a necessity that others, who do not understand,
would deem foolish.

But it is not they who must stand watch...alone...

night after night and spin my thoughts into stories
that will keep my mind active and my eyes observant.

Such is my hell...and I do not like sharing in it alone.
Believe me, it is no consolation to know that my fellow
sleeps yonder in blissful dreams...

but soon it will be my joy to have their heaven!

(continues mumbling & moving...)

#2: (very restless, as they slowly, in a lazy fashion, raise their head...still sitting, speaking slowly as if exhausted:) How I can sleep when they shout at the stars? to stay off what I so desperately need? But it is not only their noise...
my eyes are heavy, my body frozen;
yet my mind lives vivid images and my heart pounds longingly for adventures!
Such a dreamer I have become...
from searching horizons and talking to stars.
What a night this is...somehow new!
In spite of the routine repetition in this cold,
my soul is warmed by something
neither my mind's imaginations nor my delving thoughts can put into words.
Why can't I sleep? For my watch approaches much too quickly for such distractions!

#1: (at a slower rate than at first, struggling to find words:) Yes, I can hear them...
What makes them talk even in their sleep on this hellish cold night? But that will not be my fate, for even now I struggle for the words to keep my mind awake. Perhaps there is a "thorn" I can share with the stars; and so be illumined by their Divine Knowledge! (said jokingly as they begin to pantomime a dramatic tale)

#2: (in a groaning fashion:) I can't bear this much longer! Maybe their problem will be my solution...
by boring me to sleep!

#1: (as their efforts fail:) I can't even make up a good fantasy tonight that could make even the stars weep... but then tonight it would be snow! Most assuredly then, I would be found frozen with my mouth open looking for excuses!
I am so tired...but if I stop now surely it would be the end of me!

- #1: (cont.) I am parched for stories tonight...
and reality is much too boring to busy one's mind with,
that is, at least mine...
- #2: What comes upon us tonight that silences even my friend?
I begin to fear the worse, as a stillness before the storm,
but my heart tells me of consolation and finally peace...
for that I can stay awake if only for a bit longer!
- #1: If I was a Jew, I could say I was keeping watch
for something more than a bunch of slumbering sheep!
But I have no Messianic hope just an infinity of sameness...
Wife, children, friends, or whore...nothing on this
blessed earth seems to satisfy both the body
and the soul for more than a fleeting moment.
My mind worries about eternity...
the beyond touching and hoping,
the void after the last breath.
Must I wait till then to solve the riddle
and be part of the Mystery?
- #2: The stars seem to shine tonight with brighter intensity
and joy; but never before have I felt so empty
and incomplete...I starve for something more...
waiting for the night
to light my darkness!
- #1: Look! A new star...a comet!
It moves slowly across the darkness
outshining even the brightest!
- #2: Yes, I see it...even the sheep stare upward
at such an unusual sight!
(stands, moves to center stage, looking upward preoccupied
I can't pretend to sleep any longer...
something great is approaching it's threshold...
and we shall be here to welcome it!
- #1: What comes? (crosses to #2, still looking upward)
Have you some news you heard in your dreams,
that I in my anxiety have missed?
- #2: No dreams, visions, or messages...
but an assurance of the inevitable goodness,

#2: (cont.) a climbing anxious joy, that knows no fear...
banishing my sleepiness!

#1: Are we to wait for something that we don't even know of?
What can it be that even the heavens so rejoices?

#2: Yes, let us await this event...together...
even the cold is warmed by this new hope!

#1: The nights darkness is lifting...
and the world shines in the radiance of this
glorious star!
I can't help but be afraid of the unknown
and unexpected...

#2: ...no warning or prophecy even predicted such a night
of heavens glory and majesty...
I fear we are not worthy to witness this sacred moment!
(the shepherds now overcome by fear and the cold put on the
cloaks on center stage, not noticing the colors; at the
same time the Angels are heard from the back of the
audience:)

ANGELS: Shepherds, you have nothing to fear,
but in everything to rejoice and praise!

A #1: I proclaim to you the good news...
that all the earth has waited for
since your parents Adam and Eve
left heavens paradise because of sin's disease...

A #2: These are tidings of great joy
that are to be shared by the whole people,
who have awaited this joyous Mystery!

ANGELS: In this "Christed" moment,
at David's city of Bethlehem,
a Savior has been born to you...
the Messiah and Lord!

A #3: Born for your sake, Lord perpetual;
coming to take and ransom you all,
your sorrows to slake, King imperial,
Star of the East!

A #4: Let this be a sign for you...
in a manger you will find an infant
wrapped in swadling clothes.

A #1: Leave your flocks
to Bethlehem now go and see...
Where lies so freely
a child in crib poorly
between ass and ox.

ANGELS: Glory to God in high heaven,
Peace on earth to those
on whom God's favor rests.

#1: What have we witnessed?

#2: The reason why we were unable to sleep
or still our souls...

the joyous news all people are waiting to hear!

#1: And we poor shepherds that we are...

heard the word proclaimed even to us...

the royal birth of our Savior...

the answer to all our restlessness and need!

#2: Look at us, we are transformed in joy...

even our once poor cloaks

now radiate the glory we have seen in heaven's skies!

#1: No more shouting at the stars

for our ears heard heavens long awaited reply...

#2: Yes, in haste we must leave all

that we once possessed...

for now we are possessed by this good news...

#1: On to Bethlehem now for us to see

the child even the heavens have forseen...

(exit together through the audience)

A Christmastide Great Thanksgiving for Concelebrants(*):

*: Loving God, at this blessed Christmas feast/season
we give you thanks and praise.
You created light out of darkness
and brought forth life on the earth.
You made us in your image;
and though we all have sinned
and fallen short of your glory,
you loved the world so much
that you gave your only-begotten Jesus Christ
to be our Savior.

*: As Mary and Joseph went
from Galilee to Bethlehem
and there found no room,
so Jesus went
from Galilee to Jerusalem
and was despised and rejected.
As in the poverty of a stable
Jesus was born,
so from suffering and death
you raised him to bring us life.

*: You scatter the proud
in the imagination of their hearts
and have mercy on those who fear you
from generation to generation.
You put down the mighty
from their thrones
and exalt those of low degree.
You fill the hungry with good things,
and the rich you send empty away.

*: Therefore, with the angels who sang
glory to you in the highest
and peace to your people on earth,
and with your people in all ages
and the whole company of heaven,
we join in the song of unending praise,
saying/singing: .

(Holy, holy, holy Lord.....)

*: As your Word became flesh,
embodied from woman,
on that night long ago,
so on the night
Christ offered this life up for us
and took bread,
gave thanks to you,
broke the bread,
and gave it to the disciples, saying:

ALL *: "Take, eat;
this is my body which is given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me."

*: When the supper was over
Jesus took the cup,
gave thanks to you,
gave it to the disciples, and said:

ALL *: "Drink from this, all of you;
for this is my blood of the new covenant,
poured out for you and for many,
for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it,
in remembrance of me."

*: On this night of nights,
when your almighty Word
truly became "Emmanuel": God-with-us,
we remember all your acts
in Jesus Christ, and
we ask you to accept this our sacrifice
of praise and thanksgiving,
which we offer
in union with Christ's sacrifice for us,
as a living and holy
surrender of ourselves.

ALL *: Send the power of your Holy Spirit on us
and on these gifts, that
in the breaking of this bread
and the drinking of this cup,
we may know the presence of the living Christ,
be one body in Jesus,
and grow into Christ's likeness.

*: All this we ask through Christ our Savior,

ALL *: by whom, with whom, and in whom,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honor and glory in yours, Almighty God,
now and forever. Amen.

CHRISTMASTIDE/EPIPHANY: "late winter/early spring"

Festival time of celebrating the manifestation of Christ
for the world

the appearing or showing forth of Christ in our world as
Savior, Healer, & Redeemer

life being transfigured

reflecting on the mission of the Church to the world

growing & reaching out/up because of the nurturing love in
Christ Jesus: Savior & Revealer

who is this person to me?

thawing of a cold heart

surrender

abandonment

reclaiming adoption

a gnawing need to expand

a pregnant readiness

a foretaste of hope in the horizon

the smell of Spring on the way

let's get on with life

restlessness/"cabin-fever"

"The Word: A Biblical Reflection"

CHORUS: In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God. God spoke forth the Word... commanding it to give form to the chaos, and Creation arose at God's bidding. All that came to be had life in God and that life was the light of people; a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower...

#1: The Word came to Noah and told him to build an ark, to salvage Gods creation from the corruption that had spread over the whole earth. The floods came and washed the wickedness from the land...and the Word made a Covenant Promise that never again would God send floods to destroy the earth...

#2: The Word came to our foreparents: to Abraham, & Sarah, Isaac, & Rebecca, Ruth & Naomi, Jonathan & David... giving them direction and a Calling. The Word made a even more intimate Covenant with those who had heard the Word and had answered it...and Israel became God's people, the specially Chosen Ones.

CHORUS: God gives an order: the Word flashes to earth; to spread snow like a blanket, to strew hoarfrost like ashes, to drop ice like bread crumbs, and when the cold is unbearable, God sends the Word to bring the thaw and warm winds to melt the snow. God reveals the Word to us and statues and rulings God makes clear.

#3: The Word called to itself a Chosen few to proclaim the Word to God's people...so that they could hear the Word announced to them, as a sign of God's love and eternal fidelity. Prophets they were called, and the Word worked powerfully in their lives...

#4: Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you; before you came to birth, I consecrated you...I have appointed you

(#4 cont.) as a Prophet to the nations. Go now to those to whom I send you, and say whatever I command you, do not be afraid of them...for I am with you to protect you. See, I am putting my words into your mouth...

#5: Open your mouth now and eat what I am about to give you... I looked, and a hand was there, stretching out to me and holding a scroll, and unrolled it in front of me. God said: "Child of humanity, eat what is given to you; eat this scroll then go, and speak for this scroll will feed and satisfy you." I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey...

CHORUS: What a wretched state I am in. I am lost, for I am a person of unclean lips...then one of the Seraphs flew to me, holding in their hand a live coal which they had taken from the altar. With this they touched my mouth and said: "See now, this has touched your lips, your sin is taken away..." then I heard the voice of the Lord saying: "Whom shall I send? Who will be the messenger of My Word?" I answered: "Here I am, Lord, send me..."

#6: The Word was made flesh, lived among us, and we saw God's glory, the glory that is God as the only Son of our Creator, full of grace and truth...Jesus came to bring us the good news, Words of hope and joy from our Parent. The Son called to himself a Chosen few to proclaim the Words of Good News. Disciples, they were called, and the Word changed their lives...

#7: When the Son's mission was fulfilled, he returned to our Parent. His friends were not left alone, for Jesus sent to them God's Spirit, who would guide their understanding and give to them the Word to preach to all people throughout Creation. For this Word is near to you on your lips and in your heart, so that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved...

CHORUS: But how shall they call on God whom they have not believed? And how can they believe unless they have heard of God? And how can they hear unless there is someone to announce the Word to them? And how can people proclaim this Word unless they are sent?

Scripture says: "How beautiful are the feet of those who announce the Good News...Faith, then, comes through hearing and what is heard is the Word of Christ..."

#8: How deep are the riches and the Wisdom and the Knowledge of the Word...How infinite is the power of the Word to create, to heal, to bring Good News.
Triune God, we are grateful for this Word, may your Spirit place this Word deep within our lives...
so that the way we live may reflect your Word,
and our words announce it clearly to your people.
For from God and through and for God
all things are.
To God be glory forever in the marvelous Word...
Amen.

SHARING COMMUNION:

(L: Leader P: People)

Preparation of the Table:

L: For the fruit of the vine

P: for the grain of the field

L: for the strength to labor, the sun and rain

P: for those who deliver and prepare these gifts

L: Good God, we thank you

P: and pray your blessing on the work of our hands.

Eucharist:

L: We thank you God, our Creator, for your loving trust in humankind. In creation you first clothed us with dignity, called us not things but sons and daughters, and saw that we were good. You did not hesitate, even then, to offer what was most intimate of yourself, a share in your creative power. Thus from the beginning, it has ever been our vocation to fashion this world and ourselves in the image of your love.

P: Since today, as never before, your work is in our hands; we, the whole of creation, in our frailty and mystery, with all our races and peoples, come together around your table, in doubt, in love, in risk, in hope, and offer thanks in a new way. For we are not being lifted out of what is human but daring to be what we truly are, the work of your lovings hands.

L: God-touched and frail, yet possessing a dignity beautiful beyond belief, we find the courage to sing/say:

(Sanctus/Holy, Holy...)

L: Blessed are you, O God, for your loving trust in all people. When we lost faith in the dignity of our call, when we doubted your love and cursed your law, you sent not your wrath to crush us, but your child to be our savior.

P: Jesus has come to our table and eaten our bread. He walked in the cool of the evening with those he called his friends. His tears were real; his joys intense; his prayer that we might learn to love one another. Yet the sorrow which finally crushed him was one in which we all played a part. For on the night before he died, Jesus was betrayed by one who offered him a kiss, by one who called him "friend".

(Words of Institution)

P: Now, whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup, we recall the days when the Lord walked the earth with us; we remember especially that night when Jesus proved his love in one final, total offering by laying down his life for his friends. Living he taught us how to live, dying he truly set us free, and rising he gives us hope that springs eternal.

L: As nations rise and fall; as customs and cultures change the years, yet this sign will ever remain, that all people would recognize you, the living God, in the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup. We are conscious that this offering of faith is one unchanging sign which links us to ages of Christians, past and yet to come. So, we do not approach your table lightly, but only in the spirit of faith, because you bid us draw near.

P: Since we in the Christian community are those who have not seen, and yet are called to believe this mystery of faith, send over us your Holy Spirit, O Lord. Give us the Spirit who brings life, the Spirit who helps us love, the Spirit who makes all that we do not easy but full of meaning. Only with this help can we truly be the Church of Jesus Christ.

ALL: As we believe, so let us live! We pray that all people looking upon us, your Christian community, will say in a sincerity: "See how they love one another." And wherever we have walked, the report will go around that the poor

(ALL cont.:) are clothed, the hungry fed, the sorrowful
comforted, and all creation proclaims the
wondrous deeds of God!

(Communion)

Prayer of Thanksgiving:

ALL: For the bread which you have broken,
for the cup of you life which you share,
for the sins which you forgive and forget,
Good God, we thank you.
For the healing, for the mending,
for the brightening horizon,
for your eternal rainbow covenant,
Good God, we praise you.
Amen.