# Advent Calls to Worship, and a Letter to Mary

*To mark* [*Gathering*](http://www.ucrdstore.ca/magazines/gathering)*’s 30th anniversary, the following resources have been gleaned from the “best loved” material of earlier Advent/Christmas/Epiphany issues.*

## Call to Worship for the Season of Advent

Children: Are we there yet?

All: Yes, we are in the places of birth and new life.

Children: Are we there yet?

All: Yes, we are listening for the voice of God.

Children: Are we there yet?

All: Yes, God is with us even in the darkness.

Children: Are we there yet?

All: Yes, God is in the storm and the calm.

Children: Are we there yet?

All: Yes, we see clearly where we are through our tears.

Children: Are we there yet?

All: Yes, this is a place of sharing bread.

Children: Are we there yet?

All: Yes, we are at home with the holy.

Children: We are home! Yeah!

**Naramata Centre,** Summer Community Worship, August 21, 2002, Naramata, B.C.

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## Calls to Worship

### Advent 1

One: November ends. December begins.

All: We find our beginning and our ending in God.

One: Month after month, our God attends us and supports us.

All: For God’s company, we offer thanks and praise.

One: Let us worship the God who gives us Jesus Christ:

All: God who is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end,

the Living One and our Redeemer, now and forever.

### Advent 2

One: The day of the Lord brings grace and blessing.

All: We come to this day with hearts prepared for praising.

One: The day of the Lord brings judgment and pardon.

All: We come to this day with souls set on praying.

One: The day of the Lord brings wisdom and light.

All: We come to this day with minds eager to listen for God’s will.

One: In our praising, praying, listening, and responding,

All: we come to worship God.

### Advent 3 (based on Isaiah 12:5–6)

One: Sing praises to God on high, for glorious are God’s works.

All: Sing praises to the ends of the earth.

One: Shout and sing for joy, O people of God,

All: for great is the Holy One in our midst,

blessed is the One who comes to dwell among us.

### Advent 4

One: Seasons come and seasons go,

All: but our God endures forever.

One: Our faith exhibits ebb and flow,

All: but our God endures forever.

One: Our lives may freeze up or may grow,

All: but our God endures forever.

So let our souls magnify the Lord our God this day.

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## Call to Worship for Christmas Eve

### What If Tomorrow Were Christmas?

If tomorrow morning you woke up

and there were no Christmas lights

no household decorations

no Christmas trees or presents

no family gathered for special meals...

If tomorrow morning you woke up

and there was no jolly old St. Nicholas

no Rudolph, sleigh, or reindeer

no dream of festive fruit and food

nor bottled Christmas cheer...

If tomorrow morning you woke up

and all you had was only this story

a Jewish baby born in a first century hovel

another illegitimate child in Bethlehem

“the love of God embodied in a baby”...

If tomorrow morning you woke up

and on your lips were only the simple words

“for unto you is born this day

in the midst of our living

one in whom you can experience God”...

Would it be enough?

Would it be enough to know

that you are in the midst of all that God is...

would it be enough to know

that you are a part of God’s justice that might yet be...?

To see God through the window of this stable

to know the spirit of God in the birth cry

to feel the breath of God in the whimper

to see the earthiness of God in the straw

to experience the presence of God in flesh and blood...

To see God through the window of this stable

to have the song of God ringing in our ears

to be “blown away” by the power of God’s word

to know that the dirt–the floor–is holy ground

to be grounded in the being of God...

To see God through the window of this stable

to have our ears burn as the disempowered are empowered

to watch the world’s greatest humbled at the feet of the poor

to know God, not in the somewhere out there,

but in the every day

to feel God in the heart-ache, to feel God in the laughter...

To see God through the window of this stable

to see God not as a little baby, but as the ground of all that is alive

to be moved to pursue the way of God in the wilderness

to cherish every moment of every hour of every living thing

to be as a Christ, as a God presence in the living that surrounds us...

Would it be enough?

Would it be enough to know

that you are in the midst of all that God is...

would it be enough to know

that you are a part of God’s justice that might yet be...?

Here on Christmas Eve for many reasons!

It must be more than just the straw tickling a baby’s toe

it must be more than a stable full of animals settling for the night

it must be more than a manger holding new life

it must be more than carols and candles...

Here on Christmas Eve for many reasons!

What a unique and privileged experience this is

free to wander in unafraid and laughing

unrestricted speech, stories of God and faith

hope, peace, joy, love, and one called Jesus...

Here on Christmas Eve for many reasons!

A wonderful and wonder-filled time

a time of God’s desire not to be separated from

a time of God’s desire to be intimately acquainted with

the women and men, the young and old of this world...

Here on Christmas Eve for many reasons!

To be joined with family and friends in a Holy moment

for the praise of our God in word and spirit

for the love of our God so graciously offered

to witness to the birth of Jesus, a new way of being alive...

Would it be enough?

Would it be enough to know

that you are in the midst of all that God is...

would it be enough to know

that you are a part of God’s justice that might yet be...?

If tomorrow morning you woke up

and there were no Christmas lights

no household decorations

no Christmas trees or presents

no family gathered for special meals...

Would it be enough?

Would it be enough to know

that you are in the midst of all that God is...

would it be enough to know

that you are a part of God’s justice that might yet be...?

“For you have nothing to fear!...

I come to proclaim good news to you–

news of a great joy to be shared...newness is born...

Glory to God...And on earth, peace....”

God’s will to all!

Let us come and see...

Let us experience what God is making known.

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## With Deep Regret: A Letter to Mary

Dear Mary,

I intended to address this letter to “My Dearest, Beloved Mary,” but feared that at this point you would welcome only the barest of salutations from me. Maybe you have already torn these words and the papyrus upon which they are written into a thousand shreds and scattered them with the excrement that flows in the gutter. Who would blame you? I have been a fool. Worse than that, I have been an arrogant fool.

I have much more to write about you and me...but first I want to convey my deep relief and joy at the news that you are well and there with your cousin, Elizabeth, and her fine husband, the priest, Zechariah. The morning after you left, your father came to my house in a rage. He demanded to know where you were and what I had done with you. You won’t believe this, but he even broke my nose with a wooden bowl. Each time I touch it, I feel its thick pain. It makes me think of you. I’m glad he broke it!

Your mother came next, screaming like an eagle. Your father and I were rolling around in the red dust like a couple of synagogue boys. She grabbed your father by the ear, pointed an ominous finger at me, and ordered us inside the house. Quite a crowd had gathered. I’m sure that before I wiped the blood off my face, Mrs. Zebedee’s tongue had gone wagging like a dog’s tail around the village telling everyone what had happened.

Your mother told me that when they woke up that morning you were gone from your mat. I said that you had probably gone to the hills for the day. After all, since you were a little girl, that is exactly where you went whenever you were angry—to watch the spiders, you’d say. But my heart began to sink as I sensed that this was different. They said you were crying when you got home the night before and demanded to know what we had talked about.

I told them I had called off our wedding—and why. I was so shocked and hurt when you told me that you were pregnant, Mary. My heart turned to ice. And I felt insulted when you said that you believed that it was God’s will that this child, who is not mine, would change the world, liberate the people, care for the poor. It was as if you, an ignorant peasant girl, (I know this isn’t true but that’s what I was thinking) were calling me, a man, a religious elder, and your husband-to-be, a fool. My pride opened my mouth. I even convinced myself that I was doing the noble thing. Quietly calling off our engagement seemed to be the kind thing, the honorable thing. After all, everyone knows that I do “the right thing” to a fault. I would face the ridicule from the likes of Mrs. Zebedee, even from my own friends, but they would also say, “Isn’t he kind when he could have had her stoned to death?”

I was there when they stoned Deborah, Jacob’s wife. I still have nightmares. It was there, when Deborah was stoned, that I first realized that you were special among women and girls, and that I loved you. How old were you, 10 or 11 years? You must have sneaked out of the house—a pattern for you it seems. By the time your mother arrived at the stoning, you were screaming and tearing at the robes of the elders who were throwing the rocks. I was hoping that your mother would drag you away before...well, before Deborah died. So, I felt noble and honorable, sparing myself that horror.

I am glad your parents came. They told me of their shame too. They told me what they had always said to you about girls who got pregnant before they were married. People say things like that, Mary. They don’t really mean it. Not about people they love. Your father sobbed. “Cast the first stone? How could I say such a thing to my little girl?” Those are his exact words.

I was 12 years old when you were born and I watched you grow up. When your father and I agreed that you would be my wife, it was the happiest day of my life. I know—and you were right to say it—we men treat women like cows or donkeys, the way we wheel and deal over you. But, I don’t mean I felt happy in the same way I would be if I had made a good bargain with an animal. I mean I felt the deep joy of the completion of something I had always dreamed would come to pass. You helped me understand what the Torah means when it says that God saw the first human’s loneliness and said, “It is not right that this one should be alone,” and from a rib fashioned the one who would complete him. You, Mary, complete me.

So, when you told me that you were pregnant, I felt as though my whole life, my dream, everything had been ripped from my hands in an instant. I was angry. I didn’t understand. I still don’t understand completely, but I’m willing to try.

You see, the truth is that I really am the sort of man who does the right thing, not because of what the neighbours will say, but because that’s how I am. When one of my customers overpays me, even a coin or two, I return it. If I find something that doesn’t belong to me, I could no more keep it than turn water into wine. That’s just how I am. I think that it is doing the little things right that leads us to God. It’s like practice for when the big thing comes along.

The big thing, Mary, is to step through whatever gate God opens to us. You and this child are the Creator’s gate for me. What else could account for this love that feels like drunkenness, but which helps me see the world more clearly, more beautifully, than ever before? Our love, this child, will lead us to both joy and suffering. Love always does. To deny that love, however, would lead to emptiness and to death.

Mary, please come home! Give my regards to Elizabeth and to Zechariah and wish them well with their own surprising birth, but please come home. Already I am under pressure to leave for Bethlehem in order to fulfill my census obligations. I would very much like to make that journey, and all journeys from now on, with you. Together we will find the way.

With all my love, Joseph.

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