

# KEYNOTES

## Jesus Christ - The Light of the World a cycle of meditations for Epiphany

John Ferguson



This worship service was designed at the request of the planning committee for the Dallas Chapter Chorister's Guild winter conference held at Highland Park United Methodist Church, Dallas, January, 1997. A children's choir and a youth choir provided vocal leadership for the service and anthems were selected for these groups to sing as individual choirs and combined. Hymn numbers reference the *United Methodist Hymnal* and anthems as well as any published harmonizations are referenced in the play list.

### Adapting this Worship Service

A few additional comments will help anyone considering adapting this service (notice I say adapt not adopt since for most situations, adjustments will have to be and should be made). Feel free to select hymns and anthems that are practical for your choirs and congregation yet maintain the relationship to the liturgy.

The Advent-Christmas-Epiphany seasons are rich with imagery. I chose

the light metaphor for Christ, and thus this service could be used anytime during this entire season. If it were done in Advent or right at Christmas, the first lesson might need to be changed as well as some of the narration given in conjunction with the first lesson.

The lessons have additional impact when read well and with understanding by youth or older children. Each lesson could be read by a different person. The narrations work best if all are done by the same person, someone theologically literate so that the underlying spirit of the narration is reflected in the reading.

The opening sentences are from the opening of the service of evening prayer, *Lutheran Book of Worship*, page 142. The note, "the sound of bells calls us to worship," was especially effective at Highland Park in that the bells in the tower were rung, joined by handbells in the church (use F, D and C pitches because of the pitches in the opening chant from *LBW*). The tower bells continued to sound through into the first hymn, linking this whole portion of the

service together. A solemn procession would add an effective visual dimension to this beginning which was sung responsively between the choirs (or soloist and choir).

The impact of the I John lesson and the singing of the choral arrangement of *Lord of the Dance* was heightened by liturgical dance.

The tune HYFRYDOL was selected for use with the hymn *Love Divine* because its breadth and sweep seemed more in keeping with the spirit of the service. This tune and text is in public domain so it could be reproduced for congregational singing as it was done in this case. The instructions for singing were: stanza 1 - women, gently, stanza 2 - men, stanza 3 - harmony, stanza 4 - unison. The entire hymn was conceived musically as a grand crescendo, ending with full organ at the end of the last stanza. A brief coda (of about 8 bars) was improvised to bring things back down, add a quiet conclusion to this hymn to prepare the congregation to hear the words for the sharing of the peace.

### Music List

...most of the hymn accompaniments were improvised based upon the *United Methodist Hymnal* version, introductions and accompaniments published or from which accompaniments were derived are included in the following list in order of performance...

*Star Carol*, Rutter, Oxford X 233  
*See the Glowing Star*, Kemp,  
Choristers Guild CGA629  
*Go, Tell It On the Mountain*,  
in *Hymn Harmonizations*,  
Book III, Ludwig, O-10

*Rise, Shine, You People*,  
in *Hymn Harmonizations*, Book V,  
Ludwig, O-14  
*I Danced in the Morning*, Ferguson,  
Galaxy 1.5260  
*Star in the East*, White, Selah 405-316

*At the Name of Jesus*,  
in *Hymn Harmonizations*,  
Book IV, Ludwig O-13  
*Look Again at the Child*, Lord,  
Choristers Guild CGA725  
*Love Divine*, in *Festival Hymns*,  
Set III, GIA G-4124

# JESUS CHRIST - THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

## *a cycle of meditations for Epiphany*

*...the sound of bells calls us to worship...*

### OPENING SENTENCES

*sung by the choirs as the lighted candle, symbol of Christ, Light of the World, is brought into the church*

Jesus Christ is the Light of the World,  
the Light no darkness can overcome.

Stay with us, Lord, for it is evening,  
and the day is almost over.

Let your light scatter the darkness,  
and illumine your Church.

**HYMN 684** "Christ, Mighty Savior"

**MIGHTY SAVIOR**

*please stand and sing*

*stanza 1 - all  
stanza 2 - men  
stanza 3 - all  
stanza 4 - women  
stanza 5 - all, gently*

### NARRATION *(seated)*

**ANTHEM** "Star Carol"

John Rutter

### **FIRST MEDITATION** *The light of a star announces the Light of the World*

**Lesson**

Matthew 2:1-11

**Anthem** "See the Glowing Star"

arr. Helen Kemp

**Narration**

**Hymn 244** "'Twas In the Moon of Wintertime"

**JESUS AHATONHIA**

*please remain seated and sing*

### **SECOND MEDITATION** *The shepherds tell of the Light of the World*

**Lesson**

Luke 2:8-18

**Hymn 251** "Go, Tell It on the Mountain"

**GO TELL IT**

*please remain seated and sing*

*refrain - all  
stanzas - choir*

**Narration**

**Hymn 187** "Rise, Shine, You People"

**WOJTKIEWIECZ**

*please stand and sing*

*stanza 1 - all  
stanza 2 - men  
stanza 3 - women  
stanza 4 - all*

**THIRD MEDITATION** *The Destiny of the Light of the World*

**Lesson** a reading from the Gospel of John,  
the Epistle to the Philippians  
and the words of the prophet Isaiah

**Hymn 261** "Lord of the Dance"

LORD OF THE DANCE

*please remain seated and sing*

*refrain - all  
stanzas - choir*

**Narration**

**Hymn 369** "Blessed Assurance"

ASSURANCE

*please stand and sing*

**FOURTH MEDITATION** *The Adoration of the Light of the World*

**Lesson** Luke 2: 25-32

**Anthem** "Star in the East"

arr. David Ashley White

**Narration**

**Hymn 168** "At the Name of Jesus"

KING'S WESTON

*please stand and sing*

*stanza 1 - all  
stanza 2 - all, begin gently and grow with the organ  
stanza 3 - organ alone  
stanza 4 - all*

**FIFTH MEDITATION** *The Light of the World - Sign of God's Love*

**Lesson** I John 1: 1-8

**Anthem** "Look Again at the Child"

Suzanne Lord

**Narration**

**Hymn 230** "O Little Town of Bethlehem"

ST. LOUIS

*please remain seated and sing*

**EVENING PRAYERS**

**Leader:** Lord, we lift our voices,

**People:** And send our songs to you.

**HYMN** "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"

HYFRYDOL

*please stand at the conclusion of the introduction and sing*

**SHARING OF THE PEACE**

**Leader:** The peace of Christ, the Light of the World be with you, now and always.

**People:** And also with you.

# JESUS CHRIST - THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

## Narration - Dallas - January, 1997

*after "Christ, Mighty Savior"*

Jesus Christ is the Light of the World,...  
the light no darkness can overcome.

Isaiah foretold it. The prophet Isaiah wrote of the birth of one who comes to lead us from darkness to light.

Light is a powerful symbol, even for us today in an age when sometimes it seems like there is almost too much light, too much information, too much brightness, too much news. Yet we still respond to the imagery of God in Christ as light revealed. God of gods. Light of lights — this is the most important news of all time and beyond time.

Today we think again about the mystery, the story Christians call the Incarnation, the coming of God's son to earth to bring us the gift of life, to bring us salvation. Jesus Christ, Light of the World, is born for us — for you — for me.

And so, let us rejoice in this light. Let us go even unto Bethlehem and see this light which is given to us.

*after "See the Glowing Star"*

A few days ago, Christians around the world observed the beginning of the church season called Epiphany. Epiphany, what does that word mean? The dictionary tells us that epiphany means to show, to appear. It goes on to say that Epiphany is a Christian festival remembering the revealing of Jesus as the Christ to the people called the Magi, the Sages.

This evening we have heard the Epiphany story, sung by the choir and read from the Bible. Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, was shown to the sages by the light of a star. Often Jesus himself is called a star, a star that shines brighter than any star in all creation; a star so bright that all others seem dim. Christ gives starlight that can pierce through any darkness, lighten any spirit, warm any heart. All we need to do is look, see, — and believe.

*after "Go Tell It on the Mountain"*

The story of the shepherds' visit to Bethlehem to see the Christ Child concludes, "When they saw this, they made known what had been told them, — glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen."

Another dimension of the Epiphany season is the telling of the story, over the hills and everywhere. And what is it that we tell? It is of Christ, entering our story, becoming a part of our human story. It is of freedom and light, life and healing.

This is a story worth telling. This is a story so special that it should be sung, must be sung!

*after "Lord of the Dance"*

Jesus Christ, the Light of the World,

Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Dance invites us to join him in the general dance — the dance of the saved ones — the dance of life.

Christ was born to die. Eventually, death is what happens to all living things; — birth, then, — death. But Christ's destiny, Christ's story does not end with his death. Because Christ rose again from the dead, because Christ's life and death were a prelude to his resurrection, we too can live.

The English poet, Richard Crashaw, in his juxtaposition of opposites, helps us to measure the immensity of this incarnation story:

Great little one,  
whose glorious birth  
lifts earth to heaven,  
stoops heaven to earth.

The incarnation story is for all who will believe, a story for all Christians, all heirs of salvation. And what is this story, what is our inheritance? It is an inheritance of life, a story of eternal life made possible by God's gift of his Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

This is a story that is so profound, so amazing that mere words are inadequate. This is a story that calls for music; for praise filled song; for joy filled song. So, let's sing it.

*after "Star in the East"*

When they saw the baby Jesus, the shepherds bowed and gave gifts. When they found the Christ Child, the sages gave him rare treasures. Why did they do this? After all, this was just a baby, a baby born in very humble circumstances. Yet those who visited the Christ Child, those who worshipped him, must have sensed something, sensed that this was a special child, someone deserving of their adoration?

How would we have felt if we had made that journey to find the Christ Child? What would we have done if we, like Simeon, had encountered him with his parents in the temple? Would we have offered our adoration, our gifts most rare? Would we too have bowed in humble adoration at the name of Jesus? Would we have confessed him as the King of Glory?

*after "Look Again at the Child"*

At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Christ, the Light of the World.

But in order to have light, first there must be darkness; the darkness of the womb, of the earth that receives the seed, of the cave, the tomb, the night.

Darkness is a precondition of the birth, the growth, the emergence, the resurrection. At first, there is darkness.

The darkness and its works are very real. Evil does fill the land, but we don't like to talk about it, we don't like to admit that it exists. We modern, up to date people, like to distance ourselves from the idea of evil, evil as darkness. We like to psychologize evil, to see it as a social disorder, to sanitize it, to remove it to a safe distance by categorizing, computing and cataloguing it.

This denial, this sanitizing of evil is our worst darkness. We've got it all wrong and need to get back to square one, back to the beginning.

In the beginning was the Word.

We need to reaffirm our confidence in the eternal God whose laws order the heavens; whose laws bring beauty out of chaos. Unfortunately, we don't like some of these laws. We, God's people of today, are little different from God's people of yesterday. We rebel, we complain, we cause trouble and generally make a mess of things. Things do go wrong and some days it seems like devils do fill the land. But God's plan for us, God's agenda remains. God waits patiently for us to discover that the covenant has not changed, will not change. God sent his Son as the ultimate sign of that covenant. God's love, God's grace, God's truth abide forever.

And so, let us go again to Bethlehem. Let us see again the Holy Child; God's grace filled gift of light and healing, of love, hope, and life.

## **Prayers for a Hymn Festival Dallas**

O Lord of all sound: stuttering word, clamorous singing, unbroken silence, orchestras of joy, instruments of peace, proclaimers and psalmists of note, prophet's and peasant's cry, hear our prayers, our silence, our sighs beyond sound or song...(pause)

For the universe that teaches awe and proclaims mystery; for the stars that would lead us to you and the darkness that will not let us go we give you thanks and ask your blessing upon all that whirls beyond our powers to ask or imagine...(pause)

*Lord, we lift our voices. . . and send our songs to you.*

For the gift of your Son whose birth and life we celebrate in this season of light; we give you thanks and ask that the light of the Christchild will shine through all we do or say...(pause)

*Lord, we lift our voices. . . and send our songs to you.*

For the gift of children entrusted to our care we give you thanks and ask your blessing upon all young people and those who nurture and care for them. Help us all to learn that your ways give more life than the ways of the world. Give us strength to hold our faith in you and to keep alive our joy in your creation...(pause)

*Lord, we lift our voices. . . and send our songs to you.*

For the gift of creativity, for the voice of the singer, for the hands of the artist, we give you thanks and ask your blessing upon all who make music and art for your people that with joy we may glimpse your beauty, encounter your holiness...(pause)

*Lord, we lift our voices. . . and send our songs to you.*

And now, O Lord, support us all the day long of this troubled life, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes and the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then, Lord, in your mercy, grant us a safe lodging and a holy rest, and peace at the last; through Jesus Christ, our Lord...Amen.

*John Ferguson is the Elliot and Klara Stockdal Johnson Professor of Organ and Church Music at St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN. Dr. Ferguson serves on the Choristers Guild Board of Directors.*