



HOLIDAYS@FIRST



2020



HOLIDAYS@FIRST

November 29-January 6

November 29	1st Sunday in Advent	HOPE
	Children/Youth Advent-in-a-Box pick up (3-6pm)	
November 30	Labyrinth opens for Advent	
December 2	A Very Merry Children's Ministry Zoom	
December 6	2nd Sunday in Advent	PEACE
December 8	Live Nativity (Drive-by 6-8pm)	
December 13	3rd Sunday in Advent	JOY
	Lessons and Carols, Family Promise Week begins	
	Youth Christmas Movie Watch Party	
December 20	4th Sunday in Advent	LOVE
	200th Birthday of FPC Drive-By Party (5-7pm)	
December 21	Longest Night Service (7pm on ZOOM)	
December 24	Christmas Eve Services	
	*4pm (family), *6pm, 8pm *live streamed	
December 25	Merry Christmas!	
December 27	1st Sunday after Christmas	
January 3	2nd Sunday after Christmas	
January 6	Epiphany of the Lord	



November 2020

When my wife Amy was pregnant with our twin boys, her doctor told us to expect them to be delivered on May 31. With that information in hand, I began clearing my schedule for the month of June so that my responsibilities at church would be covered while I helped Amy and bonded with our newborn sons.

However, the babies had not been briefed about the importance of my work schedule. Amy went into labor late the night of May 11, and the twins arrived in the wee morning hours of May 12, a Thursday, and I was still scheduled to preach that following Sunday morning. My carefully laid plans had to be reworked on the fly!

I'm mindful that in 2020, we have all been required to rework our most carefully laid plans, sometimes more than once. Such is life in the midst of a global pandemic.

The document in your hands represents the current plan for observing the holidays at First Presbyterian Church of Athens. Your church leadership and staff continue to amaze me with their ability to improvise, adapt, and overcome the many challenges that 2020 has thrown our way, and this document is a testament to their resilience, imagination, and love.

As we prepare once again to celebrate the birth of our Savior, let us remember that Joseph and Mary did not plan to deliver their son in Bethlehem, much less to place him in a manger! However, they, too, learned to improvise and adapt and to count on the sustaining grace and providence of God, and all these years later, we're still singing their songs!

May God's peace be with you and yours,
Ryan, *Senior Pastor*

HOLIDAYS@FIRST



DAILY HYMN DEVOTIONALS

In addition to this weekly devotional, daily devotionals will be emailed to everyone during Advent. Written by members of our church family, each devotional will reflect on a different hymn or carol that is meaningful to them. Dr. John Coble will also provide a link to each selected hymn. *Jennifer Poole (jsnp5462@gmail.com)*

LIVE NATIVITY

Our 9th annual Live Nativity will be a DRIVE-BY on the front steps of the church. Come enjoy the babe, camel, donkey, other animals, and of course Mary and Joseph, the magi and shepherds. Weekday School teachers will be distance delivering to cars kits for ornament making at home, and Christmas music will be enjoyed by all! So prepare to roll your windows down, and roll on through while worshipping CHRIST, OUR NEW BORN KING!!! *Elaine Johnson (elaine@firstpresathens.org)*

200th BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

The global pandemic has shifted many of our plans to 2021, but we still want to mark this year. Join your church family for a DRIVE-BY 200th Birthday Celebration in front of the church on Hancock Avenue. We'll provide cupcakes straight to your car and have the steps aglow with 200 luminaries. You'll also have an opportunity to donate to the Bicentennial/Christmas Eve Offering and pick up candles for Candlelight Christmas Eve Service for those who will worship with us from home.

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES

We will offer three services this year for Christmas Eve with limited in-person seating available for those who sign up (link to be posted on the church website). The 4pm and 6pm services will also be live-streamed on Facebook and YouTube.

4pm: Family Service with 5th graders reenacting the Nativity story

6pm, 8pm: Traditional candlelight Christmas Eve service

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH of ATHENS

185 E. Hancock Avenue

Athens, GA 30601

(706) 543-4338

www.firstpresathens.org



Follow us on Facebook.

Facebook.com/firstpresathens



Join us on YouTube for worship.

YouTube.com/c/firstpresathensga

OUTREACH

» CASA BASKETS

Provide holiday groceries for a local Hispanic family. All money donated will go to support holiday outreach at Casa de Amistad (\$40 suggested).

» FAMILY PROMISE

Help “host” families residing in the PIT at FPC from December 13-27. Volunteer roles include overnight hosts, meals, drivers.

» FOOD SUNDAYS

Bring nonperishable items for Athens Area Emergency Food Bank. Drop off at FPC on Fridays 12/4 and 1/1 from 9:30am – 11am.

» HOLIDAY BENEVOLENCE MARKET

Shop for “symbolic” gifts for loved ones this year! Started 25 years ago by FPC this event supports over 30 local non-profit agencies in Athens.

» MEALS ON WHEELS

Drive a route on Christmas or New Year’s Day to deliver prepared meals to seniors through Athens Community Council on Aging.

» SALVATION ARMY ANGEL TREE

Shop for Christmas gifts for a child ages birth-14 through the Salvation Army Angel Tree Program. Follow the link and directions on our home page to adopt an angel and learn more.

• BICENTENNIAL/CHRISTMAS EVE OFFERING

Celebrate Christmas and honor our church’s 200th anniversary with a gift to help our neighbors in need. Donations can be made online, designating which offering in the memo or by dropping off a check to the main office.

• CHRISTMAS JOY OFFERING

Support the Assistance Program for PCUSA church workers & educational/leadership programs for students of color.

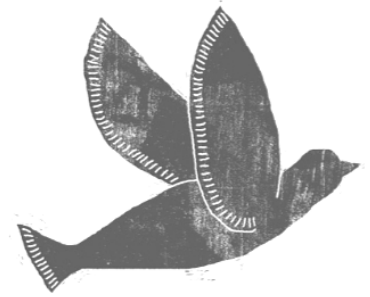
For more information visit www.firstpresathens.org.

MAYA ANGELOU AND THE FREEDOM POETRY OF ADVENT

I'm always amazed when people walk up to me and say, 'I'm a Christian.' I think, 'Already? You already got it?' I'm working at it, which means that I try to be kind and fair and generous and respectful and courteous to every human being."

- Maya Angelou

Advent means "coming" or "arrival." It's the season of actively waiting and preparing for Jesus to be born, for God's Word made flesh to come into the world.



The Christian year begins with the season of Advent, and this way of beginning is itself significant. You might think the year would begin with the trumpets of Easter, or the softness of Christmas Eve, or the fires of Pentecost – but on the contrary, we begin in the shadows of despair, war, sorrow, and hate. For it's precisely there that the God of grace will arrive, and accordingly, it's precisely there that God's church is called to light candles of hope, peace, joy, and love.

Maya Angelou is an Advent poet extraordinaire, in the sense that she often stands in the shadows and writes of the light. She boldly insists on blessedness and freedom, even as she confronts – with both candor and wit – the pain and injustice of the world. In this Advent devotional, we let scripture and Angelou's poetry be our guides, together pointing us toward weekly practices that can help deepen and enrich our experience of the season – a perfect way to prepare for the hope, peace, joy, and love of Christmas day.

So grab your favorite Bible and Angelou's *The Complete Poetry* (the poems have also been reprinted at the end of this devotional booklet). Carve out some space and time for reflection, and remember that, for Angelou, "I" often means "we."

Night has fallen, and God is coming. The question is whether we'll have the presence of mind and heart to notice, and to rejoice – and sing – when morning comes.

WEEK ONE

HOPE

LIGHT

One Purple Candle

SING

"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

"Come Ye Disconsolate"

READ

Isaiah 64:1

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence.

Mark 13:33

Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.

Angelou's poem, "A Plagued Journey"

REFLECT

Particularly during Advent, Christians are called to dwell in the shadows. After all, it's in the dark that we light candles, since that's where they'll do the most good. With this in mind, instead of simply "lighting a candle of hope," first turn toward specific shadows of hopelessness in our lives, in our neighbors' lives, and around the world. With Angelou, remember that hope and despair often ebb and flow with our days, and that many people struggle with sorrow and depression. Then keep watch, strike a match, pray, and sing.

PRAY

God of light and hope, of darkness and dawn, be with us in the shadows, even and especially in the valley of the shadow of death. Show us the way, and let us be lanterns of hope for others. Keep us awake and alert to your coming. Tear open the heavens; let the mountains of despair quake at your presence. Come, Jesus, come. Amen.



PRACTICES of HOPE

- » Light a candle. Say a prayer. Breathe in hope; breathe out hope.
- » Call or connect with a relative or friend who lives far away, and sing his or her favorite Christmas carol together.
- » Conversation starters:
In your most difficult times, what gives you hope? What signs of hope, near or far, have you seen this week?
- » More light: Read “Prayer” by Maya Angelou, and “Hope is the thing with feathers” by Emily Dickinson.
- » Many nonprofits do work that boils down to giving people hope, from Amnesty International to mental health organizations, to refugee advocates. Choose one, set aside an hour to research it, and find out how you can help. Give the gift of hope!
- » Particularly in an age of pandemic, hope can be hard to come by – and creation can be a source of solace. Get out and up as high as you can: on a rooftop, or a hilltop, or a mountaintop. “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down...”
- » Wake up early one morning this week, wait in the darkness, and welcome the dawn, that universal sign of hope. Think of this as a time for mindfulness, of “keeping alert” for God’s presence.
- Schedule time this season to walk the LABYRINTH set up in FPC Fellowship Hall. Visit www.firstpresathens.org to sign up.
- Check out the many OUTREACH opportunities for how you can spread Hope this Advent Season.

WEEK TWO

PEACE

LIGHT

Two Purple Candles

SING

"Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus"

"Down By the Riverside"

"Peace Like a River"



READ

Isaiah 40:3-5

A voice cries out, "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of God shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of God has spoken."

Angelou's poem, "Amazing Peace"

REFLECT

Alongside the candle of hope, we light a candle of peace in the midst of a war- torn, polarized world. Strife is everywhere. But God's peace – God's shalom – is more than just the "absence of war," as Angelou insists; it's "true Peace. / A harmony of spirit, a comfort of courtesies." Where do we most need this harmony today? Where in your personal life, in your community's life, in our planet's life? What would peace look like – and how are we being called to help make it?

PRAY

God of shalom, we pray for our hearts, our homes, and our world so full of war and rumors of war. Give us the wisdom and courage to be peacemakers, to "come the way of friendship." Show us the way to prepare for your coming, to make the rough places plain, to help create a lasting shalom in your world, a peace "louder than the explosion of bombs." Come, Prince of Peace, come. Amen.

PRACTICES of PEACE

- » Light two candles. Say a prayer. Breathe in peace; breathe out peace.
 - » Challenge yourself to be a peacemaker today. Identify a strained relationship, and take a concrete step toward reconciliation. Send a card, reach out, or call.
 - » Conversation starters: What does what Angelou calls, “true Peace” actually look like? What are the primary obstacles we face in building a peaceful world? How can we create or lengthen a “halting of hate time” in our own lives and hearts?
 - » Connect with someone who belongs to another religion, and wish them best wishes for the holidays they celebrate and for a happy, healthy New Year.
 - » Get out into creation, and visit the most peaceful spot you know. Savor God’s peace, and watch for God’s glory.
 - » Peace can often be found when we listen closely to our feelings. Many people use an “If Feelings Could Talk” chart to help figure out what’s happening emotionally, and what next steps might make most sense. Sadness might be telling me I need to cry. Loneliness, that I need connection. Resentment, that I need to forgive. Emptiness, that I need some creative time. Happiness, that I need to say “thank you.” Anger, that I need to check in with my boundaries. Stress, that I need some Sabbath. Try an intentional “If Feelings Could Talk” conversation with family or friends, with or without a chart: What are you feeling? What next steps can you take?
 - » Pick a day this week, or part of a day, for a silent, unplugged retreat: no screens or devices, no speaking, no problem solving. Just rejuvenating peace.
- Decorate the DOVE ORNAMENT with memories from this year, then hang it on your tree as you lift up a prayer for peace.
 - Make plans to Drive By the front of the church for our LIVE NATIVITY on Tuesday, December 8. Wave to Mary, Joseph, Baby Jesus and real animals!

WEEK THREE

JOY



LIGHT

Three Candles (2 purple, 1 pink)

SING

"Joy to the World"

"My Lord, What a Morning"

"Mary Don't You Weep"



READ

Luke 1:46-55

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Angelou's poem, "Just Like Job"

REFLECT

Alongside the candles of hope and peace, this week we light a candle of joy in the midst of a world full of sorrow. Some call joy "the secret of the Gospel," since even the greatest faith, or hope, or peace, or love – if it lacks a sense of joy, it is not yet fully alive. As Angelou put it: "Joy is a freedom," a force that itself helps a person find liberation. Can we sing a song of joy, a song of freedom, even in the midst of the shadows of sorrow?

PRAY

God of delight, God of celebration, God of good news of great joy for all people – we pray for your world so full of sorrows. Let us weep with those who weep, and rejoice with those who rejoice. Most of all, let us sing with Mary of how you delight in lifting up the lowly, scattering the proud, and filling the hungry with good things. Come, Jesus, come. Amen.

PRACTICES of JOY

- » Light three candles. Say a prayer. Breathe in joy; breathe out joy.
- » Each day this week, write down ten things for which you are grateful, ten things – large or small – that give you joy. Keep a running list (no repeats!), and read it each morning. Notice the joy that gratitude creates! To get your wheels turning, a few prompts: A strength of mine I'm thankful for is... Something wonderful I/we have that money can't buy is... Something funny I'm grateful for is... Something in nature I'm thankful for is... A memory I'm grateful for is... A current challenge I'm grateful for is...
- » Conversation starters: Angelou says, "Joy is a freedom." What does joy free you to do or to be? What's the difference between joy and happiness?
- » "Just Like Job" is written in the style of a psalm of lament: it begins in anguish, and ends in joy. Create your own psalm of lament, either as a poem, a song, a drawing, or a collage. What breaks your heart? And what gives you courage?
- » Pick the clearest night, and walk through a neighborhood with Christmas lights – and plenty of stars. Listen for an angel whispering good news, "Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people!" - Luke 2:10
- » Recruit a group of singers and go (physically distanced) caroling outside. Or gather with those in your pandemic bubble and sing the group's favorites, sitting around a "welcome table."
- As Buddy the Elf says, "the best way to spread Christmas cheer is to sing loud for all to hear." Sunday, December 13th is LESSONS AND CAROLS - join us on Facebook/YouTube as we sing loudly for all to hear!
- Help spread joy by signing up to volunteer for FAMILY PROMISE WEEK. FPC will be hosting four families in the PIT December 13-27. Let's make sure they know the joy of this season and the love of our church family. Signup information on our website www.firstpresathens.org.

WEEK FOUR

LOVE

LIGHT

Four Candles

SING

"Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming"
"Rise Up, Shepherd, and Follow"

READ

Luke 1:39-41

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit...

Angelou's poem, "Touched by an Angel"

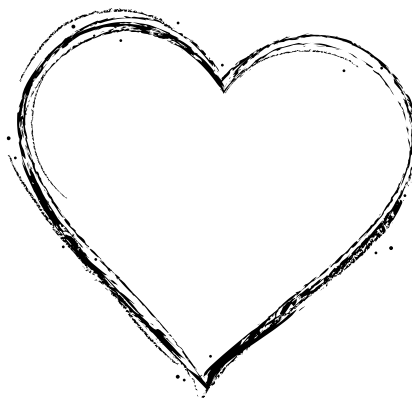
This poem was originally published as an art book titled "Love's Exquisite Freedom," illustrated by Edward Burne-Jones (Welcome Books, 2011).

REFLECT

Alongside the candles of hope, peace, and joy, this week we light a candle of love in the midst of the shadows of hate, indifference, and what Angelou calls "the chains of fear." Rancor and ruin seem to rule the day. And yet the greatest commandment of all is to love God with everything we've got, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. As Angelou insists, "it is only love / which sets us free." How can we make this liberating love more manifest in our everyday lives?

PRAY

God of love, fill us with your Spirit of courage and liberty. When we are tempted by hatred, let us sow love. When we encounter hate, let us sow love. And when we witness or receive the gift of love, let us recognize your presence, leap for joy, and boldly, bravely, freely sow love all the more. Come, Jesus, come! Amen.



PRACTICES of LOVE

- » Light four candles. Say a prayer. Breathe in love; breathe out love.
 - » Handwrite a “love letter” to someone who’s made a difference in your life.
 - » Conversation starters: What image is for you the perfect illustration of “hate”? Can love overcome hate? What (specifically!) makes you feel loved?
 - » More light: Read “In and Out of Time” by Maya Angelou, and “Love (III)” by George Herbert.
 - » It is sometimes said that “justice is what love looks like in public.” Contribute time, talent, or treasure to a just cause this week – and do it in a spirit of love.
 - » With family or friends, try this: take some greeting cards (or index cards), and write one name from the group on the top of each card. Pass them around, so that everyone can write one thing they love about that person (be sure to disguise your handwriting!). Then play a game guessing who wrote what – and put the finished cards in the Christmas tree!
 - » Blessed with good news, Mary traveled some distance to go and see Elizabeth. Whom would you go to see? Carve out some time to connect with them this week, and let them know how much you love and appreciate them.
-
- Share love for your church. Drive by the front of the church on Sunday evening, December 20th to help us celebrate our 200th BIRTHDAY. The steps will be aglow with 200 luminaries and we'll deliver birthday cupcakes to each car.
 - Share love for those who are hurting. Join us on Zoom for a SERVICE OF THE LONGEST NIGHT. We'll pray with and for those in our community who may be hurting and grieving, while remembering that the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

CHRISTMAS EVE/DAY



LIGHT

Four Candles, plus the Christ Candle

SING

“Go Tell It On the Mountain”

“Silent Night”

READ

Luke 2:1-7

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Angelou's poem, “Caged Bird”

REFLECT

Alongside the candles of hope, peace, joy, and love, tonight we light the Christ Candle as we make our way to the manger. Tonight is just a few days from the winter solstice, the longest night of the year. Here in the shadows, yet bathed in light, Jesus is born: resplendent, but poor, in a forgotten, backwater town; host of all things, but with nowhere to lay his head; gloriously free, but caught in the cage of the emperor's registration, and King Herod's murderous jealousy. In other words, Jesus meets us where we are, the better to shepherd us to freedom.

PRAY

God of hope, peace, joy, and love; God of Christmas morning; God of Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and the magi, the powerful and the dispossessed: we thank you and praise you for being a God of the shadows. We thank you and praise you for bringing hope where there is despair, peace where there is conflict, joy where there is sorrow, and love where there is hate or indifference. Give us the grace and wisdom to follow you and do the same. Thank you for being a God of freedom, who gives us a song to sing, and who will finally free us from every cage. Give us the courage and boldness to follow you into a new, dawning day. Thank you for coming to dwell with us, to live with us, and to love us back to life. Come, Jesus, come!





TOUCHED BY AN ANGEL

We, unaccustomed to courage
exiles from delight
live coiled in shells of loneliness
until love leaves its high holy temple
and comes into our sight
to liberate us into life.

Love arrives
and in its train come ecstasies
old memories of pleasure
ancient histories of pain.
Yet if we are bold,
love strikes away the chains of fear
from our souls.

We are weaned from our timidity
In the flush of love's light
we dare be brave
And suddenly we see
that love costs all we are
and will ever be.
Yet it is only love
which sets us free.

A PLAGUED JOURNEY

There is not warning rattle at the door
nor heavy feet to stomp the foyer boards.
Safe in the dark prison, I know that
light slides over
the fingered work of a toothless
woman in Pakistan.
Happy prints of
an invisible time are illumined.
My mouth agape
Rejects the solid air and
lungs hold. The invader takes
direction and
seeps through the plaster walls.
It is at my chamber, entering
the keyhole, pushing
through the padding of the door.
I cannot scream. A bone
of fear clogs my throat.
It is upon me. It is
sunrise with Hope
its arrogant rider.
My mind, formerly quiescent
in its snug encasement, is strained
to look upon their rapturous visages,
To let them enter even into me.
I am forced
outside myself to
mount the light and ride joined with Hope.
Through all the bright hours
I cling to expectation, until
darkness comes to reclaim me
as its own. Hope fades, day is gone
into its irredeemable place
and I am thrown back into the familiar
bonds of disconsolation.
Gloom crawls around
lapping lasciviously
between my toes, at my ankles,
and it sucks the strands of my
Hair. It forgives my heady
fling with Hope. I am
joined again into its
greedy arms.

JUST LIKE JOB

My Lord, my Lord,
Long have I cried out to Thee
In the heat of the sun the cool of the moon,
My screams searched the heavens for Thee.
My God When my blanket was nothing but dew,
Rags and bones
Were all I owned,
I chanted Your name
Just like Job.

Father, Father,
My life give I gladly to Thee
Deep rivers ahead/High mountains above
My soul wants only Your love
But fears gather round like wolves in the dark.
Have you forgotten my name?
O Lord, come to Your child.
O Lord, forget me not.

You said to lean on Your arm
And I'm leaning
You said to trust in Your love
And I'm trusting
You said to call on Your name
And I'm calling
I'm stepping out on Your word.

You said You'd be my protection,
My only and glorious saviour,
My beautiful Rose of Sharon,
And I'm stepping out on Your word.
Joy, joy
Your word.
Joy, joy
The wonderful word of the Son of God.

You said that You would take me to glory
To sit down at the welcome table
Rejoice with my mother in heaven
And I'm stepping out on Your word.

Into the alleys
Into the byways
Into the streets
And the roads
And the highways
Past rumor mongers
And midnight ramblers
Past the liars and the cheaters and the gamblers.
On Your word.
On Your word.
On the wonderful word of the Son of God.
I'm stepping out on Your word.

CAGED BIRD

A free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
and dips his wing
in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks
down his narrow cage
can seldom see through
his bars of rage
his wings are clipped and
his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds soft through the sighing
trees
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright
lawn
and he names the sky his own.

But a caged bird stands on the grave of
dreams
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

AMAZING PEACE

Thunder rumbles in the n
And lightning rattles the eaves of our houses.
Floodwaters await in our avenues.

Snow falls upon snow, falls upon snow to avalanche
Over unprotected villages.
The sky slips low and gray and threatening.

We question ourselves.
What have we done to so affront nature?
We worry God.
Are you there? Are you there really?
Does the covenant you made with us still hold?

Into this climate of fear and apprehension,
Christmas enters,
Streaming lights of joy, ringing bells of hope
And singing carols of forgiveness high up in the
bright air.
The world is encouraged to come away from
rancor,
Come the way of friendship.

It is the Glad Season.
Thunder ebbs to silence and lightening sleeps
quietly in the corner.
Floodwaters recede into memory.
Snow becomes a yielding cushion to aid us
As we make our way to higher ground.

Hope is born again in the faces of children.
It rides on the shoulders of our aged as they walk
into their sunsets.
Hope spreads around the earth. Brightening all
things,
Even hate, which crouches breeding in dark
corridors.

In our joy, we think we hear a whisper.
At first it is too soft. Thane only half heard.
We listen carefully as it gathers strength.
We hear a sweetness.
The word is Peace.
It is loud now. It is louder.
Louder than the explosion of bombs.

We tremble at the sound. We are thrilled by its
presence.
It is what we have hungered for.

Not just the absence of war. But, true Peace.
A harmony of spirit, a comfort of courtesies.
Security for our beloveds and their beloveds.

We clap hands and welcome the Peace of
Christmas.
We beckon this good season to wait awhile
with us.
We, Baptist and Buddhist, Methodist and
Muslim, say come.
Peace.
Come and fill us and our world with your
majesty.
We, the Jew and the Jainist, the Catholic and
the Confucian,
Implore you to stay awhile with us,
So we may learn by your shimmering light
How to look beyond complexion and see
community.

It is Christmas time, a halting of hate time.

On this platform of peace, we can create a
language
To translate ourselves to ourselves and to
each other.

At this Holy Instant, we celebrate the Birth of
Jesus Christ
Into the great religions of the world.
We jubilate the precious advent of trust.
We shout with glorious tongues the coming
of hope.
All the earth's tribes loosen their voices
To celebrate the promise of Peace.

We, Angels and Mortals, Believers and
Nonbelievers,
Look heavenward and speak the word aloud.
Peace. We look at our world and speak the
word aloud.
Peace. We look at each other, then into
ourselves,
And we say without shyness or apology or
hesitation:

Peace, My Brother.
Peace, My Sister.
Peace, My Soul.



REFLECTIONS