

All Who Have Loved His Appearing

MANIFESTATIONS OF THE CHRIST

WRITTEN WORKS | *vol. 4*



For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

2 TIMOTHY 4:6-8

We Three Kings

JOHN H. HOPKINS (1857)

We three kings of Orient are;
bearing gifts we traverse afar,
field and fountain, moor and mountain,
following yonder star.

*O star of wonder, star of light,
star with royal beauty bright,
westward leading, still proceeding,
guide us to thy perfect light.*

Born a King on Bethlehem's plain,
gold I bring to crown him again,
King forever, ceasing never,
over us all to reign.

Frankincense to offer have I;
incense owns a Deity nigh;
prayer and praising, voices raising,
worshipping God on high.

Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume
breathes a life of gathering gloom;
sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,
sealed in the stone-cold tomb.

Glorious now behold him arise;
King and God and sacrifice:
Alleluia, Alleluia,
sounds through the earth and skies.

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Epiphanies

BY CHARLIE RITCH

Christ the King Anglican Church, Birmingham, AL

When she stood before me
in Edenic innocence
and I knew the pounding of Pygmalion's heart—

When a splash of Spanish red
lingered long on my tongue
and I closed my eyes savoring like St. Teresa—

When a steep forested path
cleared into the rare air of heaven
and I felt the foolish fervor of Icarus—

When the busiest city received
my tiny ego to rest and rush in its embrace
and I believed in Babel's brave ideal—

—then in these mundane visions I made out
the definitive shape of blessed beatitude.

But when his boy crawled onto the white sheets, nuzzled against the gray gown,
and lay there, holding every moment of comfort and life that was left,
as his father lay still and silent, silent, silent—

—then I counted the cadence of your breath behind me
and studied the strength of your hands on my arms

and I wanted so badly to turn around and see you.

A New Day

BY TERESA GEER

Christ the King Anglican Church, Birmingham, AL

Dawn breaks, shattering the cold stillness of night. Worries of yesterday wither on the vine, awaiting the tears of new morn to breathe life upon the loathsome stalk. Its endless thirst anticipates the sighing groans—sorrow’s bitter taste. For God has given me another day. My eyes have gazed too long in the past. Ghosts of yesterday prowl, hungering to preclude my faith—my hopes—they hunger for the hours. But it is you Lord whose steadfast love mends the broken heart and gives strength to the weak. Hope eternal. Yes it is you Heavenly Father who has rekindled dreams that once lay like cinders smoldering...faint glow among the heaped ashes which have been given as life from Holy Breath. For in my heart your living hope is revealed...your Holy Spirit ever present. Wistful glances where youth once dwelled, you held me up in darkest of times; yet I let go, slipping from a pierced hand into the murky waters. Your light fading from my eyes as you called out to sea. My wandering heart lost, but not forgotten by thee. And yet—God has given me another day! Oh let the sweet fragrance of Holy words encompass me for it is refuge I have found. Warmth shall greet the new dawn and blindness from yesterday’s remorse shall be nevermore. For it is you Lord who has revealed green pastures where I have found solace in your arms and peace in my heart.

Consuming Fire

BY WENDY WILLIAMS

Christ the King Anglican Church, Birmingham, AL

I was laying on the floor on my back, my eyes closed, my arms open, trying to breathe and pay attention and listen. This was a new posture. I was not bent over or curled in and guarded, ready to defend—instead, but stretched out, my body the shape of a cross, vulnerable and willing to receive.

Breathing sounds so easy, but for weeks I had felt a tightness around my chest—sometimes almost crushing. I pictured myself in a place of peace: my friend’s back porch after dinner, the beauty of her flowers, empty dishes still on the table before us, the light from the candle on the table dancing. It was the candle that I turned my attention to as I asked, “What, Lord, do I want? Am I willing to ask for it? Are you willing to do it?”

The answer came so readily. I want to live. It is not the first time I have said this. There was another time, years ago, that I sat alone in a place of refuge with the same question and the same answer. To really live. We all have ways of being we are prone to return to, and I recognize mine—my tendency to enter into the painful mode of survival instead of thriving, to live entangled by woundedness and lack instead of living into the freedom and abundance that has been given. Just because something is painful doesn’t mean it’s not comfortable. Living this way serves me for a while. It allows me to manage expectations. It gives me reason for not succeeding. It gives me an appearance of strength. These are real benefits, but I cannot bear the burden forever. It suffocates me. You, Lord, are ever gracious, and your Spirit in me calls me out of my slavery into freedom and out of death into abundant life.

That candle on the table burns, and your Holy Spirit draws near, tongues of fire burning through the ropes that bind my chest, relief coming as I see the strands of the cords fray and break one by one. You have come to set your people free. I remember your words:

A smoldering wick you will not snuff out.
Fan into flame the gift you have received.
Our God is a consuming fire.

They are words of grace, of mission, of hope, of invitation to life. I have held them for weeks now, my heart continues to be wondrously warmed by them.

A smoldering wick: such an apt picture of how I felt that day on the office floor. I could not even compare myself to the flame of the candle I remembered on the table, but the flame blown out and the wick glowing and smoking and not giving any significant light or heat or beauty. I do not want to be so frail and fragile that the tiniest drop will extinguish me. Your words are full of grace and mercy. You see me. You know me in my frailty, and your word comes as a promise. You will not snuff out the struggling light. You will not leave. You will be my guard. You will feed me. A smoldering wick cannot relight itself, but you have given me yourself—you have delivered me out of the kingdom of darkness and transferred me to the kingdom of your Son.

Fan into flame the gift you have received. These are the words Paul wrote to Timothy. I hear them as an invitation to grow from my smoldering into a fire not diminished by the winds and rains that inevitably come. To grow what you have given me, to be light and warmth for others. What is the gift to be fanned into flame? Perhaps there is more than one answer, but the one that fills my mind is what Paul says is the mystery long hidden and now revealed: Christ in you, the hope of glory. There is no greater gift.

Our God is a consuming fire. This is my God who has called me into Himself to abide. This is the One who abides in me. The One who became like me to make me like Him. This is the God who desires union with me. This is more than I can understand, but I know it to be true.

I lay on the floor arms outstretched. You have given more than I have asked. I said I wanted to live; you have given me yourself, the Resurrection and the Life. I am crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. My life is hidden with Christ in God. He is a consuming fire. Oh my God, consume me.

The Shepherd's Song

BY EDEN WESTRATE

Anglican Church Of the Redeemer, Chattanooga, TN

Based on Luke 2:8-14

One night while with my flocks I sat
Watching over the sheep,
I saw a sight while out that night
When most lay fast asleep.

An angel of the Lord appeared
With a fearsome light.
The shepherds near me looked amazed
For it was awfully bright.

“Fear not,” he said, “I bring good news,
Tidings of great joy.
For in the town of Bethlehem
Is born a little boy.”

More appeared and began to sing,
“Praise to God, on earth peace.”
They vanished, then we hurried off
When their singing ceased.

We went to see the newborn King,
Who in a manger lay;
A star above His resting place
Did guide and light the way.

This King of kings in human form
To walk the humble earth,
His Incarnation's hope to all
In this child's birth.

The Body, God's Messenger

BY PEGGY VANEK-TITUS

Christ the King Anglican Church, Birmingham, AL

Tale 1.

Somewhere in the Midwest.

A Birthday.

Dark night, cold, no wind, very still

The man stuffs his pockets, both his creased brown pants, and his brown plaid shirt, with tissues.

He tucks them in real good, so family won't slip on them.

His room is sparse, clean, brown.

The low lighting is golden. He loves this.

His eyes are wet, misty, sticky. He hates this.

These two eyes of his- these liquid pools- are not from sentiment or emotion - just old age.

You can go fishing in his eyes!

And you can even have your choice between

“fresh water tears” or a “lab-raised catch”

(also known as eye-drops-overdose.)

Family is watching games, playing games, betting pennies, whispering, yelling. The little dog is wearing a paper birthday hat. A kid snaps the elastic underneath the doggy's chin. A mother says, “Stop that,” and the kid snaps it back again, harder this time. Music is turned up, and all the noise is at a maximum.

The man smiles.

“Just fill me up a plate of all that commotion, and I'll be full for days.”

All these years people ask him why he smiles so much. “I'm just so happy.”

And he is.

His mother, gone so long now, used to marinate a birthday cake in a huge plastic tub in the refrigerator with a sign that read “Do NOT

open or cut into this cake for 5 days!” A little piece of paper was taped to the lid so she could mark off the time.

“Marinating a cake?! That was for pickles and beets.” Still, it was, and is now, the finest cake he’s ever eaten.

He remembers this.

His current party cake is being wheeled into the room. It’s heavy, it’s layered; yellow like his teeth.

He’s always tossing the dental floss they give him in the trash. “I don’t want string in my mouth. Just give me one of those hard picks and be done with it.”

Family encircles him, and the candles shine.

Everyone pipes down. There are so many candles.

Family nudges one another, they’ll try not to embarrass him, as they all gear up to help him blow the heck out of all that fire.

The man crinkles up his lips with the faintest breath, and then POW!

All the candles zonk out, everyone is fanning the smoke.

Family is murmuring, “Wow! Who blew those candles out? It was like lightning! Was it you?” “No, it wasn’t me, it had to be you!” “Come on now, quit kidding around, who did it? WHO blew those candles out?!” Everyone is accusing everyone, looking hard around the room, shaking their heads.

“Well! It sure is a mystery!”

The man is squinting, pressing his nose against his small, square, looking-glass of a window. And now he’s bug-eyed. Listening.

He knows someone is listening back.

He knows someone was here.

And now someone is there.

The man loves his brown house.

He has no need of escape, from anyone or anything.

But.

He’s ready to fly—

Breath winging him high.

“Happy birthday to me.”

The man licks his fingers, coated with thick coconut icing
and eye drops.

He’ll need one of those hard picks tonight.

He reaches for a tissue and
dabs his eyes.

Tale 2.

Somewhere in the South.

Where one day it’s cold, the next day it’s hot.

One late afternoon, the last of the sun’s rays.

And then a new silent night.

Have you ever heard ‘em say,

“You know, he drank a little?”

Yeah. He drank a little.

Well. She ate a little.

Yeah. She ate a little.

And then she ate a lot.

You could not wrestle that fork from her.

She was a ‘biggin’, as they also say in the South.

Just one more.

One more last supper as it were.

One more bite.

Just one more.

One more.

Just one more.

Tomorrow—tomorrow would be quitting day, to “stop the stuff” as
it were.

Tomorrow— a new day,

a new chance at starting over, to be good.

Yeah. To be good.

She loved that.

Well. She loved the thought of that.
Always filled but not full.
Always full but not filled.
She hated that.
But you could not wrestle that fork from her.

She had only got two holiday cards this year. The first one was from the pharmacy, and it said “Give Thanks.”

The second was from a church she’d never heard of, and it said “Hope.” She tossed them on the windowsill, and figured that together they summed up the whole season, so there was no need to do anymore decoratin.’

Oh. Except for a tree branch she’d hauled in from the yard and thrown in a corner.

Her Christmas tree.

But no need to string lights, she’d just let the car headlights flicker over the leaves through the blinds when they passed by.

Years ago she’d seen a card with a woman in her living room, and there were all kinds of sweet and salty snacks piled on the furniture.

The card said, “Surrounded by Loved Ones.”

She remembered that.

She stared at the Hope card.

The Waffle House had a tree, and there was a real glittery ornament at the very top that spelled out the word: HOPE.

She thought, “It must be a thing this year.”

She’d always thought that the only thing that belonged on the top of a Christmas tree was an angel of some sort. And it was good to have a birthday cake for Jesus.

Her mama had always baked one.

She slumped in her chair, her eyes closed.

She whispered something.

She had got up to get some water.

She wanted to cry, and was just about to cry, when she stood stuck.

Jesus.

Jesus was in her kitchen.

She was bug-eyed.

She tugged at her pitifully out of season thin
pink and yellow flower blouse, tight seams.

She was so embarrassed.

She ran to her room, opened the closet.

Her face was red, getting warmer. She grabbed an ice cube from the
water and smeared it over her face. She tried holding in her stomach,
her eyes blurred, tears, why did they have to show up now?!

She knew he would not find even
one piece of fruit
in the kitchen.

She was just so embarrassed.

Jesus.

Jesus swept cake crumbs up off of her floor.

He placed a card on her windowsill, right between
giving thanks and hope.

It was an invitation
to an enormous feast
in the future.

It was going to be fancy,
as He signed it

Jesus, the Christ.

He lit up her tree,
her Christmas branch,
and tied tiny white wings to the leaves
right in the middle.
Ready to fly.

He drew a halo moon up through her blinds.
He emblazoned - and then dimmed

the stars -
and tiptoed out of the house.

THE BODY, GODS MESSENGER.
(To be continued.)

Neighborhood Tracks

BY RILEY KROSS

Christ the King Anglican Church, Birmingham, AL

- *For Everett*

You glimpse their tracks
through your bedroom window,
through the back fence slats.
We read about them in storybooks
and play with models on the kitchen floor.
You ask for them, saying, “Choo choo?”
over and over, like a mantra, like a prayer,
an opening of expectation and longing.

The tracks are always here, you must think.
But where is the train?

Until suddenly—the whistle, shrill and terrifying.
The walls vibrate.
You reach for me and we run
to the backyard to look over the fence.
The air pulses loud with presence:
power passing in mass.
You quake in my arms, unsure now
of your affections, of their end.
It is here, here, here, here, here...

thundering down the tracks
until it is gone, silent
at the vanishing point
where the rails continue
beyond your world and you
are left, again, anticipating.

Wrestling

BY BETSY KOPECKY

Christ the King Anglican Church, Birmingham, AL

He must increase, but I must decrease. -John 3:30

I woke up that Thursday morning. I had a good day planned. I was going to begin with a visit at The Foundry, a faith-based recovery program in Bessemer. I had been mentoring there for some years and loved it. I was just getting to know my new mentee, Phyllis. After my visit with Phyllis, I planned to get a manicure. I rarely did that, so it was going to be a real ‘treat.’

When I arrived I went in the visiting area to spend an hour or so with her. We sat on the sofas and began to talk. I soon noticed that she was wearing wool gloves. The weather outside was cool, but not cold, and we were inside. I asked about the gloves, and she reminded me that she had carpal tunnel syndrome, and the person who usually picked up her meds from Cooper Green could not get them until the next week. I could tell she was in some pain.

This is where the wrestling began. As we resumed our conversation I was ‘there, but not there.’ I kept looking at her hands and then my hands. I saw her rubbing her hands and wrists and then would look at my hands. I saw her fingers tense and bent, and then my fingernails, simply unpainted. My mind and my heart, my flesh and the Lord’s promptings, were going back and forth, wrestling voices.

“It would be too hard to drive down to UAB.”

“She is in need.”

“I don’t even know where Cooper Green is... much less the pharmacy.”

“Die to yourself, Betsy.... Care for Phyllis.”

“It’s going to take such a long time... this was not my plan today.”

“Let me direct your steps.”

This soul wrestling went on for a half-hour, and then I surrendered. I looked at Phyllis and told her that I would go pick the prescription up for her and bring it back.

I walked into a crowded pharmacy waiting room--thirty people in line ahead of me. I braced to be there quite a while. Instead, within ten minutes I heard the name "Phyllis" called, I was handed her prescription, and I was walking out the door. On my way out to the car, the kindness of God overwhelmed me.

As I put the paper bag in Phyllis' hands she thanked me over and over... and I was ashamed. Ashamed that I had been a Christian for many years, and yet still was prone toward selfishness, still wrestled with my desire to always be first.

As I got in my car to leave The Foundry, I looked at my hands on the steering wheel. I decided I didn't need a manicure today.

The Origin of Stained Glass

BY ZACK CLEMMONS

Christ the King Anglican Church, Birmingham, AL

Someone sat dissatisfied
in an ancient church.

He was a shepherd, or else
one who worked in the vibrant mornings and evenings,
took his rest in the plain heat of the day.
He must have heard of the desert artisans
bound to the bare media of sand, heat, and light.
Perhaps he'd fixed a leadlight in his door,
liking the warm bloom that filled his kitchen at dawn.

But here, light was only a useful word.
The masons had shaped the great stones,
enclosing the sacred space and then leaving it
for the sculptors who had filled the naves,
while the painters glossed the triptychs,
and the carpenters hewed pews
for the faithful to still themselves in,
the nave where he found himself now,
cast in the cloudy glazing's dull glow.

For all the artifactual clutter, space
remained—stone-cooled air heavy, empty,
unsanctified except in name,
against which even the dim candlelight
struggled to sing its sanctity.

So he offered the abbot his amateur labor
and formed simple, patternless collages of
sharp garnet and pale barley yellow.

He was not thinking of what would be—
ornate rose windows and intricate storied mosaics—
only what the vesper light could do
to the lambent icon of a human face.

Die Liebe Gottes

BY STEPHANIE TRAYLOR

All Saints Anglican Church, Jackson, TN

St. Stephen's Cathedral, Vienna, Austria, January 2014

It takes two of us, hips and shoulders, to shove open
the carved doors, dark wood, brass handles rubbed black
by thousands of penitent grips. Like the unborn
striving toward the world, we emerge in the nave seeking
The amber spotlights of candles. The font opens
its basin toward us, and we file past, skimming
our fingers across the surface, water cooled by stone.
In the shadows I cannot see my companions' gestures.
I have never crossed myself before.
The water runs down my fingers into my palm
as I stare down the aisle to Christ suspended
above the altar. Can he see I do not know
how to meet him?

Devotional After the Grocery Store

BY STEPHANIE TRAYLOR

All Saints Anglican Church, Jackson, TN

I stand at the kitchen sink, cool water running,
colander brimming with blackberries,
supper sizzling on the stove behind me:
two hot dogs with pickles and
unbroken tortilla chips from a new bag.
I scoop blackberries into my hands while I wait.
One at a time, I eat, divinity washing over my tongue
like wine as I close my eyes in the sun. Golden light
shimmers chartreuse through brand-new leaves.
This is the moment God looked forward to
as he crafted water and blackberries and beef and
wheat and cucumbers and corn. I see, too,
that it is very good.

Song for the Watchers

BY BO BOWEN

Christ the King Anglican Church, Marietta, GA

When I was young, Papa told me not to love the flocks. “They don’t belong to us,” he said. I remember we were in the field with the other men. Papa had an arm around the abdomen of a male. With his free hand he gave the animal’s head a calming pat while next to him another shepherd used a freshly sharpened blade to trim its wool. It was late spring, shearing season. My first season in the fields with Papa. I was still a boy, then, learning my father’s way. The task he gave me was gathering the clumps of wool and stuffing each into a sackcloth purse. These shorn winter coats would be turned over to the overseers; they would soon become blankets or cloaks to warm the wealthy.

“You give them names,” Papa went on. “You mustn’t do that. They are not yours to name. They are not for us. They are meant for others.”

“What am I to call them then?”

Papa squinted against the afternoon sun, beholding me. I imagine he was trying to picture me older, stronger, accomplished in this trade (if you can even call it a trade). What to say to me in that moment? These were formative years, and for Papa everything was a lesson. I was his only son, after all. Who else did he have to teach such things?

“If you must call them by name, this one is *kaphar*.” He gave the animal’s head another attentive pat. It snorted softly, bearing the shepherds’ grasp, uncomfortable but unafraid. The knife finished its work, and Papa released the male, giving it a gentle shove back toward the grazing flock.

Kaphar, covering. Reminding me the flock was meant for the Temple, for atonement. These were beasts of sacrifice, not domesticity. Papa pointed to several others around us. “That one is *kaphar*, that one is *kaphar*, that one is *kaphar*...”

“I get it,” I replied, gesturing to another. “That one’s *kaphar*, too.”

“No.” Papa shook his head. “That one is *shalom*. And so is *that* one, and, let’s see... *that* one.” He nodded in the direction of several other members of the flock.

“Why *shalom*?”

“Because,” my father said. “They’re female.”

I should have known. A boy, yes, but I was old enough to have learned this distinction, that the males were for burnt offerings – *kaphar*, for sin – and the females were for peaceful offerings – *shalom*.

“These are no common beasts,” Papa continued. “They are the most precious animals in all the world. More valuable than all the animals in a king’s stables. Greater than the greatest of Roman war horses. These flocks belong to *HaShem*. It is our duty to care for them. Protect them. And never, *ever* leave them. Do you understand?”

Looking up from the animals, I met his eyes and nodded. He turned his attention back to the sheep, reached out and took reverent hold of another unshorn. I went back to gathering tufts of wool.

* * *

We abide in the fields. It is far too much trouble to bring in the flocks every night, nor is any village pen trustworthy. The flocks we tend are substantial and valuable. There are few pens anyway; most folks in Bethany, Ein Karem, Bethphage, and the other towns that lie in the shadow of the Holy City tether their family goat or ox inside their houses at night. Besides, the Law commands animals intended for sacrifice must dwell outside for a full year, even the rainy months. So, our time is spent in the fields around Migdal Eder, the ancient watchtower that marks the Temple pastures. To the south is Bethlehem. To the north, the Mount. We usually avoid both. We’re shepherds, after all.

Throughout my many years of tending, I’ve learned to accept our reputation as outcasts, even if I don’t necessarily understand it. The priests don’t care for us – to them we’re an unfortunate necessity. The rabbis and the lawyers overlook us, seeing in our tattered and smelly garments only a dishonorable, uneducated lot. And most commoners don’t trust us. They think us disreputable carousers, men who’ve chosen a life away from society, contributing not to the good of a local village but only to the industry of the Temple. While some in these villages may eventually purchase one of these animals when they go up for the festivals, most people in this land can’t afford the asking price for an unblemished lamb. Instead, they offer the family goat or a pair of pigeons. To the commoners, we shepherds are nothing more

than rich men's slaves, lurking far too close to their doors for comfort.

If our jobs contribute to big business, we see no returns. Those among us who make sacrifices, who choose to brave the stares and upturned noses and occasional, prejudicial threats of the Temple crowds, can afford nothing. All we have to give is the meagerest of possessions – grain meal, which our women harvest from the wild edges of others' fields. I've often sat under the stars at night, watching as the lights of the nearest village extinguish one by one, and wondered to myself, *Are we poor because we're shepherds, or are we shepherds because we're poor?*

* * *

We take turns in the fields. Each month, a few men are given leave to return to the encampment and see their women. The rest of us remain in the fields, awaiting our turn to do the same. At night, we sleep in shifts. To stay awake, those on watch walk amongst the flock. When the moon is but a sliver, we must be vigilant. Predators thrive in these hills. Lions, leopards, foxes, and bears all prowl at night. So do thieves who slink down from the rocky hilltops. An unblemished ram fetches quite a price on the black market. In my years, I've encountered them all, and I can't say for certainty which is the most dangerous. On our shifts, we keep alert. A lost ram, a wounded sheep, even an abrasion caused if the flock scatters... every mistake means less pay, and that means less food to send back to camp.

When the lambs are born, we swaddle them. Like babies. When allowed to move about on their own, newborn lambs are maddeningly prone to accidents. One stumble or nick of the hide renders the animal blemished, unfit for the intended sacrifice. Even the birth canal can cause defects. So, our job is to inspect them and then wrap them. A tedious task, but it's for the best. When the Temple authorities come out to inspect the flock, they're nothing if not thorough. They expect every animal, from the lambs to the adults, to be perfect. We shepherds receive no praise for those that pass. Only condemnation when blemishes are found. Ours is a thankless job.

This is the season of long nights. Sometimes it feels like darkness is annexing the day, shaving it off at both ends. Papa is long since passed, but his many lessons haven't faded from my mind. I have children of my own now, back in camp. A few more years and my

eldest will join me in these fields, just as I did with my father. I'll introduce him to these pastures, to the paths we weave among them. I'll give him a purse and direct him to gather the shorn clumps of wool. I'll teach him to use a staff, to read tracks, to discern scents on the wind. He'll learn our way in full and inherit our place in this world. This will be his life, for better or for worse. I often hear Papa's voice in my mind, those lessons of my youth. *Time is a circle, my son. It always repeats, generation to generation, never changing.* As reasonable a notion as that seems, when I was younger, I found such words dispiriting. To me, time was a grand story unfolding. And like any good story, at any moment something extraordinary might forever alter our circumstances. Now, after decades of shepherding these fields, rain, shine, and rain again, I see like most things Papa was right. And yet, under these stars tonight, there is the faintest whisper of longing inside me. Longing for something different. For the cycle to be broken.

Other words fill my mind, too. *Behold*, speaks the Lord through his prophet, *I am doing a new thing. Now it springs up – do you perceive it? I make a way in the wilderness.* This was a *targum* – one of the bite-sized pieces of sacred Torah – I've held onto since I was small. A good word for any shepherd, I always believed. A call to expectation. To alertness. The flock seems restless tonight. Walking among them, I see many shifting about. They don't doze, but instead pique their ears. They snort and sniff the air, expelling little clouds of frustration. They sense something. Can hear it, or perhaps smell it, drawing close. My hand tightens around my staff. I signal to the others on watch, meeting their eyes. *Keep alert*, my gaze tells them. *Something is near.* I can feel my heart quicken. It will be one of those nights.

* * *

When it is over, and the fields are quiet again, we stare at one another with stunned expressions. We on watch and the others around the fire, startled awake by the visitation. Some gaze up wonderingly into the starry night, which only moments earlier was filled with a light so bright it is difficult to believe the hills are not now on fire. Around us, the flock calms, chews grass, slips back into a doze. A gentle wind caresses the land. *Kaphar* and *shalom*.

You must go! I turn as if spoken to, but the other men are still staring, mouths agape. The voice, I realize, is in my mind. Papa's voice. Only now it is filled with an earnestness quite unlike the man I knew. You must go, my boy! *You must see. Now it springs up – do you not perceive it? He makes a way in the wilderness.*

When I speak, the sound of my voice in the quiet almost makes me jump. The men look at me questioningly, so I say it again. "We must go. We must see this thing *HaShem* has told to us." "It isn't for us," says one of the men by the fire. He's still clutching the thin blanket that was draped over him before the heavens opened. His eyes are wide, unblinking. He looks to say more – to give reason for his hesitancy – but only repeats, "It isn't for us. It must be for others." I approach the fire. My heart pounds. Those faint whispers of longing from my youth now cry out inside me. All that I ever wished for, which the years in these fields assured me could never be, has indeed broken through and brought an end to the endless cycle, just as I always hoped. How can we – even we – ignore what the Lord wishes us to see?

"It *is* for us!" I say, wanting it to be true. And then it occurs to me it *is* true. This message, and this sight, is actually for us!

This will be a sign to you, that extraordinary voice said. A baby, swaddled in cloths, placed in a manger. Like ... a lamb. It's true, *HaShem's* face has shined upon us. I step closer to the others around the waning fire. This is no king born in a palace. He will not be found in some wealthy, privileged home. This will be a humble house – the humblest – for the only coverings available to this newborn are swaddling clothes and the only crib an ox's feeding trough. For whatever reason, this family is hardly better off than we. To us is born an overlooked king, an unnoticed savior. We shepherds, I explain to the men, may be the only ones capable of recognizing him at all.

One of the men gestures to the flock. "Do we just... *leave* them? How can we?" "How can we not?" another quickly replies. I see a wide grin spread beneath his scraggly beard. He meets my eyes.

I nod. I realize I'm smiling, too. For the first time, something more precious than these has come. Again, I hear Papa's voice in my mind. *This is kaphar. This is shalom.* Nothing more needs saying. We wrap our cloaks, grip our staves, and set off for the little town lying still and unaware in the distance.

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Program design by Amy Kross

ORDO

An Epiphany Gallery & Event
Saturday, January 6th, 2024

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|---|--------------------------|
| “We Three Kings” comp. John H. Hopkins | <i>Nikki Templin</i> |
| Invocation & Introduction | <i>Fr. Zack Clemmons</i> |
| “Oh Shenandoah” arr. Nancy and Randall Faber | <i>Nikki Templin</i> |
| The Body, God’s Messenger | <i>Peggy Vanek-Titus</i> |
| A New Day | <i>Teresa Geer</i> |
| Consuming Fire | <i>Wendy Williams</i> |
| The Origin of Stained Glass | <i>Fr. Zack Clemmons</i> |
| “To Know the Dark” | <i>Sarah Scherf</i> |
| Neighborhood Tracks | <i>Riley Kross</i> |
| Wrestling | <i>Betsy Kopecky</i> |
| Epiphanies | <i>Charlie Ritch</i> |
| “Rhapsody in A Flat Minor” <i>composed & performed by David Templin</i> | |



Christ *the* King
ANGLICAN CHURCH