

A Season of Song

A series of seasonal meditations from John Rackley

22 November 2020

The hymns of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany are among some of the most popular in the churches and beyond. In this series I offer a meditation on one such hymn each Sunday beginning next week on Advent Sunday, 29 November, until the close of the season of Epiphany on 31 January next year.

I will choose them from our hymnbook *Singing the Faith*.

Not only are they some of most popular hymns they are also among the most important in the Christian canon. They describe the biblical story surrounding the arrival of Jesus. They use numerous metaphors to explore the meaning of the 'Word become flesh'. Light and dark is a major one, but there is also fear and joy, doubt and faith, power and vulnerability.

Of course, it is the tunes that catch the ear in this season. They are among the most memorable and enjoyable. They capture and expand our emotions of delight, lament, uncertainty and hopefulness. They also have a life beyond the Church in the collective memories of families, schools and concerts.

They provide a world-embracing season of song.

My selection is going to be personal. You might like to make your choice alongside mine and ask *what are my top twelve songs for this season and why is each one important to me?*

When I was regularly leading services, I found it frustrating how resistant congregations could be to singing new hymns at this time of the year. Woe betide me if Carols by Candlelight did not include what everyone could sing with gusto - "none of this new stuff John". It was a pity because some of the newer material is very helpful.

I notice that just under half of the selection for Christmas in *Singing the Faith* is not traditional. I wonder if we were able to sing this coming Christmas how many of them would be used. One in particular draws my attention as we come to the close of 2020 in all its traumatic drama.

It is *Jesus is the heart of Christmas* (STF 207) by the Jehovah Witness Marguerite Kendrick. Its final verse reads:

*Jesus is the heart of Christmas,
find his peace on busy days.
**May the messages of Advent
guide us through the Christmas maze.**
Jesus is the heart of Christmas
sing each carol in his praise.*

And what a maze it is at present!

A prayer

God of all peoples,
may the messages of Advent
lighten our load
shine on the path we must follow
and unlock our desire for
hope and consolation
through the gift of Jesus Immanuel.

John Rackley, November 2020