
EMMANUEL

A GUIDE TO THE ADVENT SEASON



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ADVENT: LIGHT IN DARKNESS

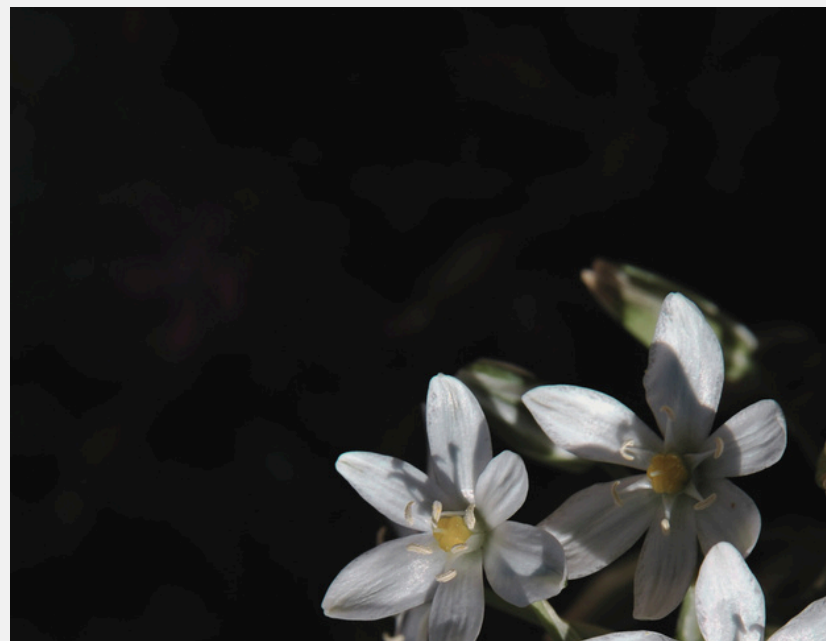
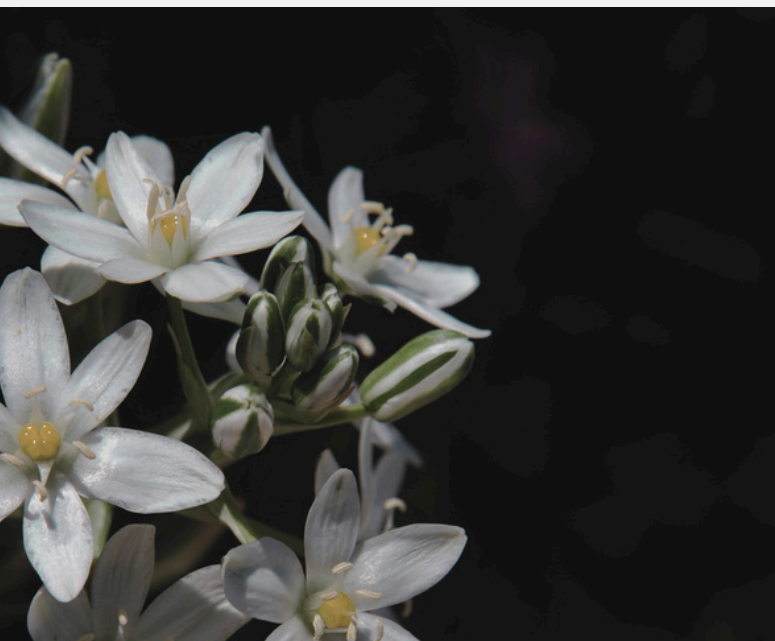
Often in our culture, we think of Advent as a 25-day calendar of small treats or appetizer gifts for Christmas: chocolates, cookies, small toys, coffee, makeup, etc. These things can be helpful in building our excitement for Christmas, but they fall short of the beauty and history at the core of Advent.

Advent, the four Sundays leading up to Christmas, is the beginning of the Christian year. It is a season that uniquely captures the hope of the people of God without shying away from the inherent longing we feel for sin, suffering, and death to be removed from the world. Advent is a season that helps us remember and live inside the people of God's longing for the Messiah—his final plan to rescue the world from Sin and Death—as we long for Christ's return. It is the same longing of Hebrew slaves in Egypt, Israelites wandering through the Sinai wilderness, Babylonian exiles returning to rebuild God's temple, and the longing of the disciples between Good Friday and Easter Morning. Fleming Rutledge describes the tension of hope and suffering during Advent:

“The disappointment, brokenness, suffering, and pain that characterize life in this present world is held in dynamic tension with the promise of future glory that is yet to come. In that Advent tension, the church lives its life.”

Advent is far from a gloomy season; it intends to instill hope and resilience in God's people. The word Advent itself means to be awaiting an arrival. The hope and resilience that the Advent season forms in us are not out of touch with the very real darkness caused by sin and death. Rutledge, again, famously tells us that "Advent begins in the dark." It is in the recognition of the darkness in which we find ourselves that the light of the arrival of Christ becomes so bright.

Similarly to how Lent prepares us to celebrate the resurrection on Easter Sunday, Advent prepares our hearts and minds to celebrate Christmas. Lent is a season of fasting with Jesus along the way to the cross. Advent is a season that lays hold of hope in darkness in the presence of Christ's incarnation. This regular practice of hope strengthens our anticipation of Jesus' second coming. The season lifts our gaze to the work of God in Christ; a God who keeps his promises, reconciles all things to himself, and makes his blessings flow as far as the curse is found.





ABOUT THE ADVENT GUIDE

This guide aims to orient our hearts in the season of Advent toward the arrival of Christ in the incarnation and the arrival of Christ at his second coming through ancient, written prayers and Scripture readings. Each week focuses on one of the major themes of the Advent season: Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love.

INSTRUCTIONS

This guide intends to take you through 15-20 minutes of daily devotions during Advent. Begin each devotion by slowly reading the prayer for that week. We find it helpful to read these prayers out loud; hearing ourselves say the words can often remind our hearts of what is true, especially when our circumstances make it difficult to remember or experience the truth we know. After reading the prayer out loud, you will find a scripture passage that reflects the week's Advent theme. You may also find it helpful to journal your feelings and thoughts after the passage. Here are some helpful questions you may consider as you journal through the text:

How does the passage reflect this week's Advent theme?

How does the passage show my need for Jesus?

Is there a call to forsake sin? Or a command for godly living?

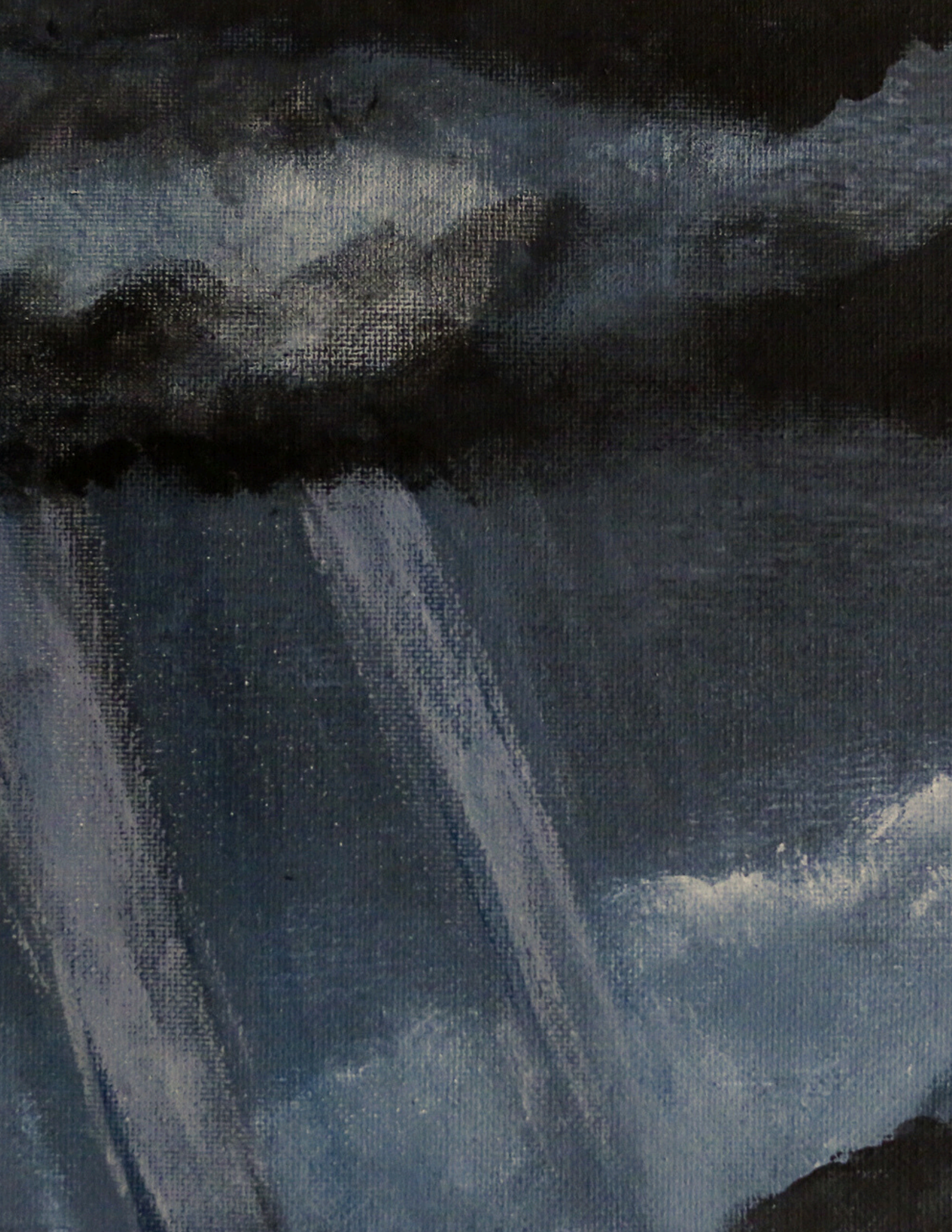
How does the passage make clear the brokenness of our world?

In what ways do I feel the hope of Jesus' second coming?





Of all the seasons of the church year, Advent most closely mirrors the daily lives of Christians and the church, asks the most important ethical questions, presents the most accurate picture of the human condition, and, above all, orients us to the future of the God who will come again. - Fleming Rutledge



ADVENT CALENDAR

7

WEEK 1: NOVEMBER 30 - DECEMBER 6

HOPE



WEEK 2: DECEMBER 7 - 13

PEACE



DAILY PRAYER

Blessed Lord, who caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Help us to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them so that by patience and the comfort of your holy Word, we may embrace and always hold fast to the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.



DAILY READINGS

Monday: Jeremiah 33

Tuesday: Psalm 2

Wednesday: Matthew 1:1-17

Thursday: Luke 2:1-20

Friday: Revelation 21:9-27

WEEK 3: DECEMBER 14 - 20

JOY



DAILY PRAYER

O Lord Jesus Christ, you sent your messengers, the prophets, to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries may likewise make ready your way by turning the hearts of the disobedient toward the wisdom of the just so that at your second coming to judge the world, we may be found as a people acceptable in your sight; for with the Father and the Holy Spirit you live and reign, one God, now and forever. Amen.



DAILY READINGS

Monday: Psalm 16

Tuesday: Isaiah 12

Wednesday: Zephaniah 3

Thursday: Philippians 1

Friday: Revelation 19

WEEK 4: DECEMBER 21 - 24

LOVE



DAILY PRAYER

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and as we are sorely hindered by our sins from running the race that is set before us, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and forever. Amen.



DAILY READINGS

Monday: Micah 5

Tuesday: Hebrews 13

Wednesday: Philippians 2



THE SONG

Written in the unseen
uttered in the unformed
whispered back and forth by heavenly chorus
echoed throughout cosmos,
there is one song.

Lilting through garden branches
passing the dappled shade
of each new Eden morning,
it hangs on the air.
Adam anticipates it.
Later, the familiar tune
will be wept alongside
his bride, in and among
the pain of thorn and thistle.



The song is believed in faith
by Abram as he becomes Abraham.
Prayed by Sarah
over an empty womb.
Shouted as a battle cry
as Jacob wrestles.
Etched into the walls
of pit and prison cell,
Joseph sees the good
where evil intended.



The melody is carved
into the flesh and souls
of Hebrew slaves,
a different burden borne.
It will grow and change for them,
becoming compass and manna.
In the wilderness nothing
ever stays the same.

The song will become a judge
unto its singers and hearers,
making the rise and fall of
all kinds of kings.
David laments each of its lines
in the tunnels of caves
and he teaches it to his soldiers,
a march to war against his enemies.

Until, once again in chains,
 now of their own making,
 the singers driven to Babylon,
 exiled and returned.
 The song's cadence falls into
 a different kind of march,
 of a new kind of wilderness.

The singers sing to deaf kings.
 The song falls silent
 for four hundred years.
 The edge dulled, its purpose lost.

A young girl takes it up
 afresh and on her own.
 From her humble condition
 she teaches it to a mute man,
 an old prophet remembers,
 shepherds find the song's key,
 and angels sing in harmony.

All of creation crescendos
 to trumpet what began
 in the dark, bursting forth in light, yet
 quiet as the dawn and snow falling.

The song's composer
 has come to conduct.

He teaches His symphony,
 weaves it into
 hearts and minds
 scandalizing all peoples
 by calling all peoples to sing.
 Words of life and wounds repaired,
 in taking up His own song.

Whenever He dies,
 His friends turn the song into a dirge
 in fear, almost too afraid
 to even sing it ever again.

But the cry of agony,
 the grinding of a stone
 set over the mouth of a tomb,
 all are part of the song,
 just as He himself
 was the song itself.

A battle is fought, won,
 and the song becomes
 a shout of victory.
 Impossible beyond all hope
 the song has not died,
 but resounds death's funeral.

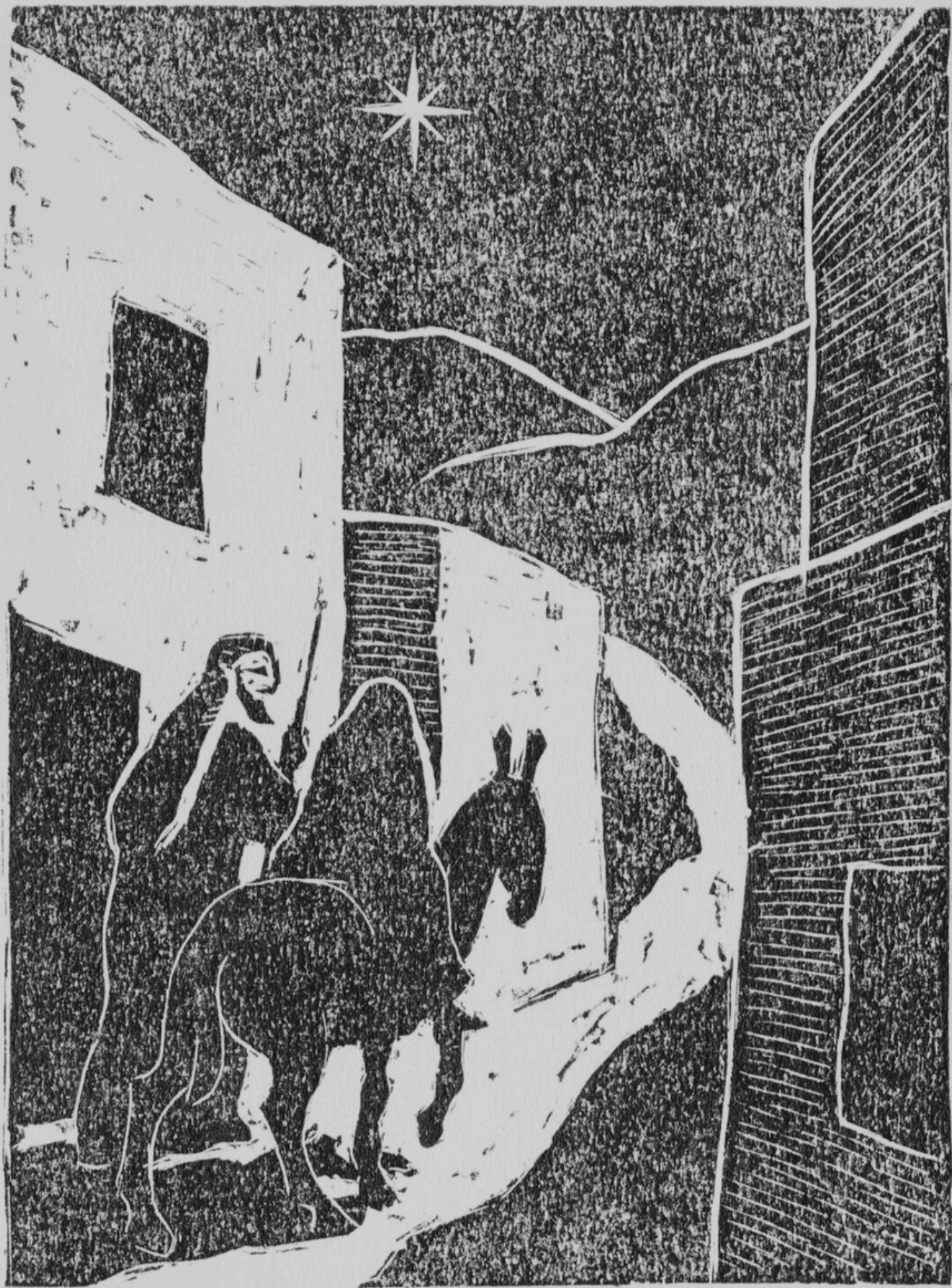
We have been taught to sing,
 learned the lines,
 and taken up our parts.
 It is the same song,
 from the beginning,
 and one that will be at the end.

To the great day,
 the final battle,
 the festal feast,
 face to face with composer.
 With all singers before and after,
 joined to eternity's anthem.

The song is sung
 from the birth pains
 of creation's first day,
 echoing out in fear
 from the very halls of hell,
 we sing now and will again:

"O come, O come, Emmanuel"

Written by Blake Burrough



Appendix

ART & ILLUSTRATION CONTRIBUTION

KRISTEN HEBLE
DAN & JED HART

CONTENT EDITOR

REINNA CRUZ

LITURGY & WRITING

AIDAN SIMS

EDITORIAL SUPPORT

BLAKE BURROUGH



