

**LESSON ONE – The Rev. Rob Keim**

God creates man and woman to live in obedience to him in the Garden of Eden

(pause)

In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”

Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,

“This at last is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
this one shall be called Woman,  
for out of Man this one was taken.”

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

(pause)

**Thanks be to God!**

**LESSON TWO – Paula Smith**

In the fullness of time, God sent his Son whose reign is for ever and ever

(pause)

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

For to which of the angels did God ever say,  
    "You are my Son;  
        today I have begotten you"?

Or again,

    "I will be his Father,  
        and he will be my Son"?

And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,

    "Let all God's angels worship him."

Of the angels he says,

    "He makes his angels winds,  
        and his servants flames of fire."

But of the Son he says,

    "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever,  
        and the righteous scepter is the scepter of your kingdom.  
You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness;  
therefore God, your God, has anointed you  
    with the oil of gladness beyond your companions."

And,

    "In the beginning, Lord, you founded the earth,  
        and the heavens are the work of your hands;  
they will perish, but you remain;  
    they will all wear out like clothing;  
like a cloak you will roll them up,  
    and like clothing they will be changed.  
But you are the same,  
    and your years will never end."

(pause)

**Thanks be to God!**

**LESSON THREE – Robert Merritt**

*December Humbug* by Jim McPherson

(pause)

December's wild collective madness strikes!  
We all submit like slaves to Santa's lash  
and with our hearts and minds and credit cards  
crown Santa as de facto Season King.

Remote from human suffering at the Pole,  
he speaks to those who dream of better things  
beyond injustice misery and toil  
to offer tinsel hope and brittle joy:  
"Just come to me, and I will bring relief -  
my cargo cult will save you from your grief."

I cannot soil the Incarnation's gift  
with Santa's baubles or his sugared grift.

Give me the God whose feet have touched the ground  
and walked with us as human as ourselves  
to celebrate our joys and share our pain;  
who's borne injustice hunger and fatigue  
and who, forswearing all escape, endured  
our human death; and Death's defeat secured.

December's now the torment of my year;  
while Santa's bogus claims assault my ears  
the One we fete, who lived our living's ills,  
is trampled in the rush for happy pills.

(pause)

**Thanks be to God!**

## LESSON FOUR – Mary Ann Hjalmarson

*Christmas* by John Betjeman

(pause)

The bells of waiting Advent ring,  
The Tortoise stove is lit again  
And lamp-oil light across the night  
Has caught the streaks of winter rain  
In many a stained-glass window sheen  
From Crimson Lake to Hookers Green.  
The holly in the windy hedge  
And round the Manor House the yew  
Will soon be stripped to deck the ledge,  
The altar, font and arch and pew,  
So that the villagers can say  
'The church looks nice' on Christmas Day.  
Provincial Public Houses blaze,  
Corporation tramcars clang,  
On lighted tenements I gaze,  
Where paper decorations hang,  
And bunting in the red Town Hall  
Says 'Merry Christmas to you all'.  
And London shops on Christmas Eve  
Are strung with silver bells and flowers  
As hurrying clerks the City leave  
To pigeon-haunted classic towers,  
And marbled clouds go scudding by  
The many-steepled London sky.  
And girls in slacks remember Dad,  
And oafish louts remember Mum,  
And sleepless children's hearts are glad.  
And Christmas-morning bells say 'Come!'  
Even to shining ones who dwell  
Safe in the Dorchester Hotel.  
And is it true,  
This most tremendous tale of all,  
Seen in a stained-glass window's hue,  
A Baby in an ox's stall ?  
The Maker of the stars and sea  
Become a Child on earth for me ?  
And is it true ? For if it is,  
No loving fingers tying strings  
Around those tissued fripperies,  
The sweet and silly Christmas things,  
Bath salts and inexpensive scent  
And hideous tie so kindly meant,  
No love that in a family dwells,  
No carolling in frosty air,  
Nor all the steeple-shaking bells  
Can with this single Truth compare —  
That God was man in Palestine  
And lives today in Bread and Wine.

(pause)

**Thanks be to God!**

**LESSON FIVE – Tricia Ottesen**

*17th Century Nun's Prayer for Christmas and the New Year*

(pause)

Lord,  
Though knowest better than I know myself  
that I am growing older and will some day be old.  
Keep me from the fatal habit of thinking I must say something on every subject  
and on every occasion.  
Release me from craving to straighten out everybody's affairs.  
Make me thoughtful but not moody; helpful but not bossy.

With my vast store of wisdom, it seems a pity not to use it all,  
but Thou knowest Lord that I want a few friends at the end.  
Keep my mind free from the recital of endless details;  
give me wing to get to that point.  
Seal my lips on my aches and pains.  
They are increasing, and love of rehearsing them is  
becoming sweeter as the years go by.  
I dare not ask for grace enough to enjoy the tales of others' pains, but help me to endure them  
with patience.  
I dare not ask for improved memory, but for a growing humility  
and a lessing cocksureness  
when my memory seems to clash with the memories of others. Teach me the glorious  
lesson that occasionally I may be mistaken.

Keep me reasonably sweet; I do not want to be a Saint-  
some of them are so hard to live with  
- but a sour old person is one of the crowning works of the devil. Give me the ability to  
see good things in unexpected places,  
and talents in unexpected people.  
And, give me, O Lord, the grace to tell them so.

(pause)

**Thanks be to God!**

**LESSON SIX – David Ottesen**

*Christmas Bells* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

(pause)

I HEARD the bells on Christmas Day  
Their old, familiar carols play,  
And wild and sweet  
The words repeat  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!  
And thought how, as the day had come,  
The belfries of all Christendom  
Had rolled along  
The unbroken song  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!  
Till ringing, singing on its way,  
The world revolved from night to day,  
A voice, a chime,  
A chant sublime  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!  
Then from each black, accursed mouth  
The cannon thundered in the South,  
And with the sound  
The carols drowned  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!  
It was as if an earthquake rent  
The hearth-stones of a continent,  
And made forlorn  
The households born  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!  
And in despair I bowed my head;  
"There is no peace on earth," I said;  
"For hate is strong,  
And mocks the song  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"  
Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:  
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;  
The Wrong shall fail,  
The Right prevail,  
With peace on earth, good-will to men."

(pause)

**Thanks be to God!**

**LESSON SEVEN – Karen Reinecke**

*The Stable* by Sister Mary Chrysostom

(pause)

The winds were scornful,  
Passing by;  
And gathering Angels  
Wondered why

A burdened Mother  
Did not mind  
That only animals  
Were kind.

For who in all the world  
Could guess  
That God would search out  
Loneliness.

(pause)

**Thanks be to God!**

**LESSON EIGHT – Lorrie Erno**

The Word was made flesh and we have seen his glory.

(pause)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

(pause)

**Thanks be to God!**



**LESSON NINE – Shirley Holgate**

*A New Year's Poem* by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

(pause)

Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,  
The flying cloud, the frosty light;  
The year is dying in the night;  
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.  
Ring out the old, ring in the new,  
Ring, happy bells, across the snow;  
The year is going, let him go;  
Ring out the false, ring in the true.  
Ring out the grief that saps the mind,  
For those that here we see no more;  
Ring out the feud of rich and poor,  
Ring in redress to all mankind.  
Ring out a slowly dying cause,  
And ancient forms of party strife;  
Ring in the nobler modes of life,  
With sweeter manners, purer laws.  
Ring out the want, the care, the sin,  
The faithless coldness of the times;  
Ring out, ring out my mournful rimes  
But ring the fuller minstrel in.  
Ring out false pride in place and blood,  
The civic slander and the spite;  
Ring in the love of truth and right,  
Ring in the common love of good.  
Ring out old shapes of foul disease;  
Ring out the narrowing lust of gold;  
Ring out the thousand wars of old,  
Ring in the thousand years of peace.  
Ring in the valiant man and free,  
The larger heart, the kindlier hand;  
Ring out the darkness of the land,  
Ring in the Christ that is to be.

(pause)

**Thanks be to God!**