

CELEBRATING ADVENT AT WESTMONT COLLEGE

with Steve Bell

“The Three-Fold Coming of Christ”

Eve of Nativity

OPENING SONG:

Christmas Medley (Instrumental)

God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen / Angels We Have Heard on High / Silent Night

Arranged by Steve Bell

Album: The Feast (Steve Bell)

The Three-fold Coming of Christ

We do a terrible disservice to the Christmastide season if we treat it merely as a time to recall something that happened once... long ago. It is surely a season of joyful recollection to be sure, but the mystery of the incarnation suggests something far deeper than that. Father Gabriel of Magdalen puts it eloquently:

He came with love to Bethlehem
He comes with grace into our souls
He will come with justice at the end of the age

What separates the Incarnation from other events in history is that it is something that *happened*, that *is happening*, and that *will surely happen*. All three events are aspects of one movement, that is, of God's tenacious solidarity with God's own creation.

This next song was written while I was once enjoying a quiet coffee in my favorite coffee shop. Suddenly, without warning, the room was filled with the presence of Christ in a way that I will never find words to adequately express. It was like the air turned to liquid fire. But like the burning bush of Sinai, it was not a consuming fire, but rather, an enwombing fire. And even as my soul was bathed with wonderment and joy, the experience left me with an ache as deep as I've ever known... an inconsolable longing for the time when Christ, and his Kingdom, will come in its fullness at the final consummation (marriage) of heaven and earth as promised in Revelation. Such mysteries are far too wonderful for us to take in at once. But by the grace of God's spirit we can *apprehend* what our finite selves cannot possibly *comprehend*. And this, dear friends, is the wellspring of Advent joy.

SECOND SONG:

Even So, Lord Jesus Come

Music and Lyric by Steve Bell

Album: Symphony Sessions (Steve Bell)

Even so, Lord Jesus come
Oh, divine and glorious Son
Though we live as your body here on earth
Even so, Lord Jesus come

Gracious Father, Sovereign Lord
Your creation's One adored
By your hand we receive your majesty
Even so, Lord Jesus come

Holy Spirit, breath of life
Light a path through darkest night
In your care we confess our deepest sigh
Even so, Lord Jesus come

Christmas Day

And finally, we come to Christmas day; the nativity (birth) of Jesus. My friend, the English poet Malcolm Guite, wrote a magnificent poem for this occasion called "Descent." The poem contrasts the characteristics of Jesus with the characteristics of the pagan gods of the ancient world. It functions as a comparative polemic: *They were like this... but You are like that...*

The historian Rodney Starks, in his book *The Rise of Christianity* suggests that the most outrageous sentence written in first century Rome was "for God so loved the world." The pagan world, he argues, would have had no catcher's mitt for such a statement. The gods weren't lovers... they were users. Malcolm's poem brilliantly seizes on this contrast in celebration of the One who emptied himself, took on our broken flesh, and eternally bound himself to our fate, which, it turns out, is redeemed in the process.

Glory to God in the Highest indeed! And equally... Glory to God in the lowest!

THIRD SONG:

Descent

Lyrics by Malcolm Guite

Music by Steve Bell

Album: Keening for the Dawn (Steve Bell)

They sought to soar into the skies
Those classic gods of high renown
For, lofty pride aspires to rise
But you came down

You dropped down from the mountain sheer
Forsook the eagle for the dove
The other gods demanded fear
But you gave love

Where chiseled marble seemed to freeze
Their abstract and perfected form
Compassion brought you to your knees
Your blood was warm

They called for blood in sacrifice
Their victims on an alter bled
When no one else could pay the price
You died instead

They towered above our mortal plain
Dismissed this restless flesh with scorn
Aloof from birth, and death and pain
But you were born

Born to these burdens born by all
Born with us all astride the grave
Weak to be with us when we fall
And strong to save

For more about Steve Bell and his music, please visit www.stevebell.com