

DEDICATION

To my friend Bob Harvey—
no one I know loves Christmas more.

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All Scripture adaptations/paraphrases, the meditations, and all of the recommended song-prayers are by David Haas.

The song-prayers are available in various printed and recorded formats, and as individual MP3 downloads from GIA Publications, Inc. 7404 South Mason Avenue, Chicago, IL 60638 (www.giamusic.com / 1-800-442-1358).

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**A complete digital-download of all of the song-prayers recommended
in this booklet can be found at giamusic.com/born.**

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INTRODUCTION

Advent is filled with expectations of joy and celebration. But for many, this season is also a time of brokenness, deep ache, and at times, despair. We need to remember that Lent-Easter is not the only rhythm of prayer that digs into the paschal mystery of dying and rising; even the birth stories touch upon this mystery. The infancy stories of the gospels of Matthew and Luke offer a vision for an alternative way to celebrate and pray.

While it would be a mistake to look at Advent as a penitential, “quasi” Lent, the rhythm and structure of our traditional stations of the cross can serve us in deepening our experience of the events leading up to Christmas—joyful and sorrowful alike. Like the familiar stations or “way” of the crucifixion that we walk during the season of Lent, we can travel the “way” of the incarnation. It is a path grounded in the joy, awe, and mystery of new birth and new beginnings. The nativity of the Christ happens not only in our sacred history but through all time—including right here, right now.

The Christ, who is named Jesus at his birth (a name that means “deliverance”), comes not in triumph or grandeur, but in utter simplicity. He arrives in the midst of the poor and the “least of these,” born into a family and race that lived and endured on the margins.

The prayerful path that you find in these pages is about marking time and space, much like the stations of the cross that we observe during Lent. These stations can be prayed individually, in small groups, or in a larger gathering for a parish or other type of faith community. The cross is not the central symbol here, and the journey is not tied to the icons that are traditionally found in a Catholic worship space. Given that, I recommend the use of light as a way to mark the various steps and stations of this journey. I suggest that fourteen candles be used, each initiating a “station.”

The candles can be arranged in a simple straight line across the front section of the sanctuary or spread out throughout the church or other gathering area.

If this prayer is prayed communally, the text provides roles for a prayer leader (who does not have to be an ordained minister), two readers who will proclaim the Scriptures appointed for each station, and the people. It is important that the leaders/readers be well prepared so that the proclamation of these words of prayer is clear and easy to understand.

Please observe a relaxed and prayer-filled pacing throughout. Each station is punctuated at the end with musical suggestions that can be listened to in a reflective manner, or sung during the service (all of the music is available directly from GIA Publications: www.giamusic.com). Bring your own creativity and ideas for how sung prayer can add to this experience.

It is my hope that the rhythm of prayer provided here can help us all discover the journey to Christmas in a new and fresh way—perhaps even as if we were discovering it for the very first time.

May we come to realize that we need the Christ child to show the way. May we come to know that we, too, can be born again as the presence and body of Christ—people who can announce strong and true “tidings of great joy” to all who seek to follow Jesus in faith and in mission. DH

THE FIRST STATION

Zechariah: “Overwhelmed”

LEADER The First Station: Zechariah

The following dialogue between the leader and those gathered can be spoken or sung:

LEADER We need the child to show the way.
Come now, be born in us today.

ALL Come now, be born in us today.

LEADER Let us be attentive to the wisdom of God.

As the word of God is proclaimed, the leader lights the first candle.

≡ **WORD** ♦ LUKE 1:5A, 8A, 11-15; 18-20

READER 1 During the time of the ruler Herod,
there was a priest named Zechariah.
Once, when it was his turn to serve,
an angel of our God appeared.

READER 2 Upon seeing the angel,
Zechariah was overcome with fear.
But the angel said to him,
“Do not be frightened, Zechariah,
for your prayer has been heard.
Your wife Elizabeth will give birth to a son,
and you will name him John.
This son will be your joy and delight
and many will rejoice at his birth,
for he will be great in the sight of God.”

READER 1 Zechariah then said to the angel,
“How can I be sure of this amazing gift?
For I am very old,



And my wife is very advanced in age.”

READER 2 The angel responded to him,
“I am Gabriel.
I stand in the very presence of God.
I was sent to speak to you directly
about this good news.
But because you have not trusted my words,
you will be made mute—unable to speak—
until the day that these very things take place.
They will all come true in due season.”

A brief pause for meditation.

≡ **MEDITATION**

ALL *Help us, O God, to be open to your gentle compassion.*

LEADER Too much to take in.
Too much to believe in.
Forgive us if we are cautious,
even cynical. *R.*

Like Zechariah, we aren't sure
we can handle another disappointment.
Our hopes have been dashed too many times.
Like Zechariah, we get tired of waiting. *R.*

Do not lose your patience with us, God;
keep your love close by.
Open our hearts.
Help us to be open to your gentle compassion. *R.*

Help us stay open to the mystery
and resist the pitfalls of being “realistic.”
Keep bringing on the amazing things
and give us eyes to see and ears to hear. *R.*

A brief pause for meditation before moving on to the next station.

THE SECOND STATION

The Annunciation: “Nothing Is Impossible with God”

LEADER The Second Station: The Annunciation

The following dialogue between the leader and those gathered can be spoken or sung:

LEADER We need the child to show the way.
Come now, be born in us today.

ALL Come now, be born in us today.

LEADER Let us be attentive to the wisdom of God.

As the word of God is proclaimed, the leader lights the second candle.

≡ **WORD** ♦ LUKE 1:26–38A

READER 2 Six months later, the same angel, Gabriel, was sent to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a young woman named Mary. She was engaged to Joseph, a man who was from David’s house.

READER 1 The angel said to Mary,
“Greetings, highly favored one!
God is most certainly with you!
Blessed are you among all women!”
But Mary was troubled and perplexed by these words,
and she wondered what this greeting meant.
The angel continued, “Do not be afraid, Mary.
You are favored by God.
You will conceive and give birth to a son,
and you shall name him Jesus, which means ‘Deliverance.’
His dignity will shine forth,
and he will be called the Only Son of the Most High.”



READER 2 Mary then said to the angel,
“How can this possibly be, as I have never been with a man?”
The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit of God
will come to you,
and the power of the Most High will consume you.
This newborn will be known as the Holy One of our God.
And know this—your cousin Elizabeth
has conceived herself in her aging years.
She was thought to be infertile,
but she is now in her sixth month.
You see? Nothing is impossible with God.”

READER 1 Then Mary proclaimed,
“I am God’s servant. Let it all happen as you say.”

A brief pause for meditation.



MEDITATION

ALL *Help us, O God, to remember that nothing is impossible with you.*

LEADER We try to be open to your will.
We know, deep down,
that you are in charge, and we are not. *R.*
Still, we are often afraid to surrender to your path,
afraid of what you might ask of us.
We fear your requests will be too hard,
mountains too steep to climb. *R.*
We forget that Mary was a mere teenager.
We forget that she was poor,
and that her faith-filled “yes” came from a place
of humility and trust. *R.*

Help us to remember
that nothing is impossible with you. *R.*

A brief pause for meditation before moving on to the next station.