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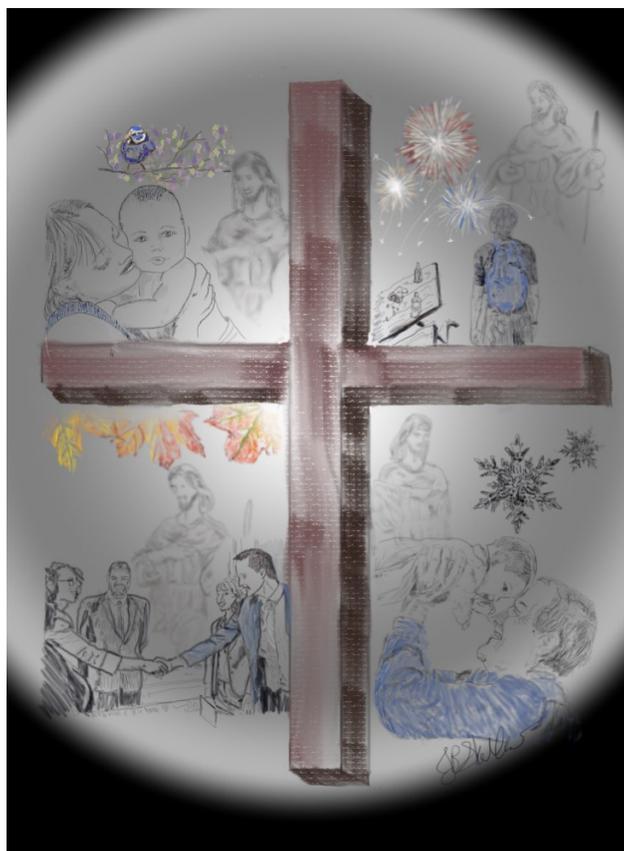
## *Cover Art*

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# *Emmanuel*

## *in Every Season*

*Spring*



## *An Advent Devotional*

*If anyone is in Christ,  
he is a new creation.  
The old has passed away; behold,  
the new has come.  
- 2 Corinthians 5:17*

December 24

*“Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid.” - Luke 23:5-56*

It is harrowing to read of the object brought down from the cross. No longer a he, “it” is brought down, wrapped up and left behind. Often when we see a dead body, there’s no mistaking. The person you knew is gone. “Shell” is the right word for what is left.

Each spring our congregation hosts a plant swap. We share seedlings, divided plants, and stories of gardening successes and challenges. This past year a man brought dried out flowers, the seeds preserved in the flower. The flower’s glory was shriveled, but it remained the best container to transport precious cargo.

We see this each year: plants we had forgotten growing back in springtime. God has written into the laws of nature our hope for rebirth and renewal.

Yet no other body had contained such seeds before Jesus. There had been prophecies, temporary resurrections. Still, the widow’s son in Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-24) had not raised a crop of new life. He raised his mother’s spirits and left this earth again in his time.

Jesus is breaking new ground. This is the point Luke is making mirroring the virgin tomb with the virgin womb. Jesus was the firstborn from the virgin. He is the firstborn from death. His victory predestines ours, “in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 8:29).

“It” was brought down. He is raised up. New creation was contained in that wilted flower, so that the ancient song must be fulfilled: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!” (Luke 2:14).

- Rev. A. Daniel Guagenti

December 25

*“Children born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”  
- John 1:9-16*

Who doesn’t love a baby? My oldest daughter is going through a baby phase, obsessed with any infant that comes along. If someone’s had a baby, she wants to see pictures. If someone at church has a baby, she wants to hold it.

The reason, I believe, that Christmas remains so much more popular than Easter is because it’s fundamentally a holiday about a baby. Marty Robbins sang that “Christmas is for kids, anyway.” Good Friday is a grown up, almost R rated, holiday (think of the film “The Passion of the Christ”). No one really wants to hear about a man beaten, whipped, and then nailed to a cross to die. But the story of a baby lain in a manger, sung about by angels and visited by shepherds, resonates even in our secular culture.

Christmas is about birth – not just the incarnation of Jesus, but yours and mine. Even the cutest, most innocent looking baby is “conceived and born sinful and under the power of the devil until Christ claims us as His own.” Satan wants nothing more than a world of creatures cut off from their Creator.

By water and the Spirit, God rebirths us and makes us little babies once more. The Lord gives us a trust in Jesus’ life, death and resurrection that makes us no longer children of this world, but children of God. Our baptisms lay us into the manger with Jesus, so that the angels of Bethlehem are as much singing about us (“peace on earth!”) as they are about Christ.

It is Good Friday and Easter that gives Christmas its meaning. But Christmas is the time to remember that those who have received Jesus, and believed in His name, are now children themselves once more.

- Rev. Charles St-Onge

We pray: “O Savior, child of Mary, Who felt our human woe; O Savior, King of Glory, Who dost our weakness know: Bring us a length we pray To the bright courts of heaven, And to the endless day.” (LSB 359)

We pray: Blessed Father, cause us to rest in your loving care as your beloved children. In the name of Your Son Jesus we pray. Amen.