



**Mennonite  
Church**  
Canada

Resource Centre

# From our Churches

*Author: Doug Klassen, Rob Van Dyck*

*Church: Foothills Mennonite*

*Date: Christmas Eve, 2007*

---

This resource is part of a larger **From Our Churches** archives available as an inspirational resource to teachers, ministers and others of Mennonite Church Canada. Posted by permission of the author. Permission to reproduce and distribute is granted.

## I Wonder as I Wander

**Cast:** Isaiah:  
Mary:  
Shepherds:  
Magi:  
Simeon:  
Herod:

**Others involved:**

Solo/duet/trio:  
Scripture Readers:  
Song Leader:  
Pianist:  
Guitar:  
Trumpet:

**Choir:** Mary Did you know  
Little Boy Jesus

**Solo:** "I wonder as I wander," verse 1

## **Welcome and Prayer**

O God, we draw near in awe,  
wonder and adoration this holy night.  
We bow before the mystery of your coming,  
that you came at such an unexpected time,  
in such an unexpected way,  
and in such unexpected circumstances.  
Draw near to us as we come to contemplate  
your incarnation on this holy night. AMEN.

Good evening and welcome.  
Welcome to all of you who have joined us here  
this Christmas Eve.  
Our service this evening began with a song that some may be more familiar  
with than others.  
This song is going to set the tone of the evening.  
"I wonder as I wander" is a song whose composer is not known.  
John Jacob Niles, a famous American folk singer first heard the song years ago  
as he was in Murphy, North Carolina.  
There was a family of revivalists who were camping out in the town square.  
Their young daughter Annie sang this song.

Caught by the beauty of the tune, he asked the little girl to sing it for him  
so that he could write it down.  
When he asked her where she had learned it,  
all he was told was that her mother taught it to her and before that, her  
grandmother taught it to the little girl's mother.

I wonder as I wander why God would come for the sake of poor lowly people,  
and why would he come in the way he did?

Picking up on this wondering theme, we will see how Isaiah, Mary, the  
Shepherds, the Magi, Simeon and even Herod had cause to wonder.  
Some, like Isaiah, Mary and the shepherds wondered, "Why us?"  
The Magi wondered about the sign and king born as a baby.  
Simeon wondered if this could be it - the promised one.  
And Herod wondered what Jesus would mean to his power as a Roman  
tetrarch.

But we won't leave it at that.  
We will wonder too.  
Through our singing together, we will together wonder what significance Jesus'  
birth 2000 years ago has for us right now.  
How are we saved by all of this?  
How can all of this still have meaning for us?

We are glad that you have joined us this evening, and have come to search  
together with us.

In our searching, may God touch us again by the power of the Christmas story,  
but also by the simplicity and humility of it.  
May God bless us all as we gather in his name.

**Carol:** O Little Town of Bethlehem #191

**Scripture:** Luke 2:1-20

**Duet:** "I wonder as I wander," verses 1-2

Isaiah: *(pacing back and forth with long sighs)* Another sleepless night - fourth time this week. I don't know what's wrong with me. I just can't seem to rest. I can't get this message out of my mind. *(Pause)* And yet if I tell anybody about it, I know what people will say. They'll say: "Isaiah, you old prophet, you're talking crazy. It's just a half-baked fantasy. Nothing will ever come of it." Maybe they're right. I mean, it's preposterous, and yet, it is so wonderful, I can't stop thinking about it.

You see, God has revealed a great promise. A virgin will conceive and bear a son who will grow like a little shoot out of an old stump, bringing hope to those in despair. He will be called 'Immanuel,' which means 'God-with-us.' I think that is what God is telling us. God is coming to show us a new way. No more of the powerful picking on the powerless. No more leaders who only look out for themselves. Instead, God will send a child who will be a light to the nations, the Saviour of all people, and by his wounds all of us will be healed. But when will he come? How will we know when the child is here?

Ah, maybe I am going crazy. How can wounds be the seeds of salvation? Can an infant really bring about a new kingdom? Can a little child threaten palaces or topple armies or bring rulers to their knees? It seems ridiculous but, then again, when has God ever done things in the way we would expect? People might call me a madman, but a new day is coming so I must tell people about it. I will believe in it and wait for it. And I'll dare to wonder about it, even if it means losing some sleep.

**Carol:** Lo, How a Rose #211

Mary: I sure hope Joseph and I can find a place to stay tonight. I've never seen so many people in Bethlehem, but I guess everyone is here to register for the census. *(pause and sigh as if contemplating)* The baby should come any time now. It's hard to believe. Sometimes it feels like everything has happened so fast and sometimes it feels like we have been waiting forever. I have to hand it to Joseph. He has really stuck by me through this. Most men would have divorced me once they learned I had become mysteriously pregnant. But it seems he too realizes that something miraculous is happening.

It might sound strange, but I know that the baby is going to be a boy. The angel told me to name him Jesus - that he will be called the Son of the Most High and that he will be a great king and reign forever on the throne of our father, David. The angel told me so much but I have to admit that I still feel scared. I don't even know how to raise a baby? Why couldn't the angel have told me how to do that? I worry about it even more when I think of who is growing within me. Who am I to deliver the one who will deliver us? Why not somebody greater or wiser? I'm just a simple maiden, a lowly servant. What do I have to offer a king?

**Choir:** Mary did you know?  
Little Boy Jesus

**Carol:** Away in a Manger #194

Shepherd 1: What a night!! No one is ever going to believe this. I still can't believe it myself. Do you realize what we just saw? I mean there were angels, and they were talking to us, and they were in the sky, and my ears are still ringing from all the singing, and I was so afraid, but then they said "Don't be afraid," so then I was only a little afraid and wow! *(pause)* We met the Messiah tonight. Us! Of all people! I still can't believe it.

Shepherd 2: Don't you think it's strange that the Messiah was born in such a dumpy place. I mean, aren't kings usually born in palaces? And where was everyone else? I would have thought that all the big religious leaders would have been there. But tonight, it was just us and the animals. Usually when important things happen, we're the last to know Strange.

Shepherd 1: Oh, how can you be thinking about that? Didn't you just see what I saw? This is the most fantastic thing that has ever happened to us. We've got a story to tell! I wonder what people will say. Do you think they will believe us? I know we are just shepherds, but this is big news!

Shepherd 2: No seriously, don't you think it's weird that more people weren't at the stable to welcome him? I know it's a busy time of year, but surely they would have made time for the Messiah. It's almost as if the angel chose to tell us first. Instead of being at the back of the line, we were actually at the front.

Shepherd 1: I know! Isn't it wonderful! For once in our lives, the last were first!

Shepherd 2: Well, don't get used to it. Do you really think that will ever happen again?

Shepherd 1: We can only hope.

**Carol:** Hark! The Herald Angels Sing #201  
Angels we have heard on high #197

Magi: What really makes a good gift? I'm not sure any more. (*pause briefly to contemplate*) Have you ever been in the marketplace and looked around at all the items and wondered, "What on earth am I going to buy for this person that would be special? What can I give to tell them they are important to me?"

My companions and I came here from way out East. It took us many days and nights to get here, traveling across some pretty bleak countryside. But we were determined to pay homage to the child who had been born a king. We saw the news of his birth written in the sky and we followed his star all the way to the tiny town of Bethlehem. We wanted to honour him and bless him so we brought the most expensive gifts money can buy. Gold fit for royalty. Incense of the type that only priests dare burn. Myrrh, an extravagant oil for anointing, should he suffer any wounds.

These are the kind of gifts that would normally be sure-fire hits. It's just that when we went in and spent a moment in his presence, I experienced something that I've never experienced before. I felt like I needed to back away, but I also felt I like I needed to draw closer. It's strange but even though he was the little child and I'm a man with great wisdom and stature, I was the one who felt foolish. I was the one who felt vulnerable. And when we laid our gifts before him, I almost felt like they weren't enough, like I should be giving more. Not in the sense of giving more extravagant possessions or riches or wealth.

It might sound strange, but he didn't seem to need that stuff. His glory came from something different. Instead, I felt like I should be giving him more of me. As if it was my very life that he wanted.

**Carol:** O Holy Night GS #58

Simeon: I used to wonder if anything would ever change. Everyday I went to the temple to pray for the deliverance of our people. Every week I gathered in the assembly for worship. Every year, I participated in the great festivals. I've spent my life trying to be faithful, trying to do good, to show kindness to friends and strangers, to give what I can to those who are in need. All the while, I kept telling myself, "Keep believing, Simeon. You might be an old man, but keep looking and waiting for God's help for Israel." But day after day, week after week, year after year, nothing new ever seemed to happen. Our people still suffered under the same old corrupt government, same old oppression, same old poverty, and same old violence. One night I had a dream in which God told me that, indeed, I would see the Messiah before I died. I held onto this hope for a long time, but as the years slipped by, I began to question whether it was really true. Would I ever see God moving? Would I ever see God's new day?

I used to wonder if my faith had grown stale. Most of the great stories of faith that I have heard since I was a little boy are about God's spectacular deeds: rescuing the people from bondage, parting the Red Sea, levelling the walls of Jericho, empowering shepherd boys to prevail over giants. Those faith stories are full of glamour and excitement. My faith story, on the other hand, has been full of ordinary routine.

I used to wonder if a faith like mine had any value. But today everything changed. Now I only wonder and marvel at the faithfulness of God for I finally saw him. After all these years, I finally saw the One for whom I have been longing. I saw the Christ child. As usual, I went into the temple today and there he was. He was with his parents in the temple courts: only a wee infant present for his dedication. I got to hold him in my arms. I got to look into his face and suddenly the whole world looked different. I told his parents that surely this child is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel. And I praised God, saying, "Master, now I am finally at peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation!" It's a strange thing for an old man to say, but it's almost as if this newborn child made me feel like a newborn as well.

**Carol:** What Child is this #215

**Herod:** *(pacing back and forth with long sighs)* Another sleepless night - fourth time this week. I don't know what's wrong with me. I just can't seem to rest. I can't get this message out of my mind. *(Pause)* And yet if I tell anybody about it, I know what people will say. They'll say: "Your majesty, King Herod, with all due respect, you're talking crazy. It's just a half-baked fantasy. Nothing will ever come of it." Maybe they're right. I mean, it's preposterous, and yet I can't stop wondering about it.

Magi from the East came to me asking where they could find some child who had been born 'King of the Jews.' Evidently, they saw his star in the sky and followed it here. I would have just laughed it off, but my advisers told me that the "Jewish Messiah" *(mocking tone)* is supposed to be born pretty close to here in the village of Bethlehem. I sent the Magi to Bethlehem to find this child so they could tell me where he is. But it's been months now and still no word back. I wonder what happened to them. Is it possible that they aren't obeying me? Might they have found a child who's been crowned king? By whose authority? Certainly, not mine!

Ah, listen to me worrying about these things. Maybe I am going crazy? Can an infant really bring about a new kingdom? Can a little child threaten palaces or topple armies or bring rulers to their knees? It seems ridiculous but, then again, wouldn't you expect a king to protect his power? People might call me a madman, but this isn't a time to leave things open to unpredictable possibilities. It's a simple reality - sometimes it's better for innocent people to die for the sake of saving a kingdom. I need to find this supposed Messiah and eliminate him. I can't bear to lose anymore sleep wondering if he's out there.

**Trio:** I wonder as I wander (vs. 3&4)

**Closing** I wonder as I wander, a traditional Appalachian tune, sung by a little girl, articulates what we have tried to communicate this evening. It articulates something else as well: wonder is key to Christmas.

Had Isaiah, or Mary or the Shepherds or the Magi or Simeon not given themselves over to wonder, they would never have experienced what they did.

Christmas will never reveal its full mystery to us if we do not allow ourselves to be lost in wonder.

As you go from here this evening, back to your homes, back to places of rest and comfort, wonder.

Wonder about all the good things you experienced this last year.  
Wonder, as to why Jesus, who could have wanted any wee thing,  
a star in the sky or a bird on a wing.  
Or all of God's angels in heaven for to sing,  
Yet he chose to come as a humble king, born in a manger.

And wonder as well, what this could mean for you.

Wonder if there is a way that God wants to bring you into this story, like he has done for so many others.

Wonder about how God is calling you, how God might want to bless you in the coming year.

Wonder about what God has in plan for you and your family.

And wonder as well, how this child - God incarnate - continues to renew his birth by being born in your heart and in mine.

Through prayer, the hearing and the reading of the living Word, the rebirth takes place in our hearts, and we are formed in God's image, God's presence deepened within us.

**Carol:** Silent night