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Knowing the Word



Essay by Lois Sanchez

Can we begin to imagine the goings-on in heaven? Consider the excitement of celebrating Jesus' birth. Think about the joy in realizing salvation through his death and resurrection. For a moment, picture that we are there now, face to face with Jesus.

Let's envision just one likely scene: We are at a spectacular musical worship occasion — a performance of Handel's Messiah at a gathering in heaven including multitudes who had participated in performances and countless more who had thrilled to experience the work — maybe repeatedly. Who else do we imagine worshipping together in this way?

In a remarkable Holy Spirit-inspired sprint of 24 days, devout Lutheran George Frederic Handel wrote the Messiah in 1741 in England. Although the debut was during Lent in 1742, we think of this piece also as a beloved Advent tradition. It is celebrated as Handel's best known work and as the best loved choral work ever produced. Reportedly, Handel made numerous revisions to his score even after its premiere performances, which were not included, it is said, in the first published score not available until 1767, eight years after his death.

Charles Jennens, also a devoted Christian, was a patron and librettist who had worked closely and frequently with Handel. He was the mover and shaker we need to remember as we are blessed through this work. Jennens knew his Bible well and compiled the libretto for Messiah, diligently and purposefully pulling and organizing directly from the King James Version of the Scriptures. He presented it to Handel, and provided inspiration toward Handel's composition of the musical score. Jennens was, reportedly, shocked and miffed that Handel completed this so quickly. He felt that Handel likely had just not taken the sacred work he prepared for him seriously enough. The "miffed" part would pass soon enough — it became one of the world's most-performed oratorios.

> ***As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace ... in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.***
>
> 1 Peter 4:10-11

The oratorio includes numerous biblical passages, particularly from Isaiah's prophecies but also Malachi, Haggai, Jeremiah, and Zechariah; Job; the Psalms; Revelation (see Chapter 19 for the Hallelujah Chorus!); John, Luke, and Matthew; Hebrews; 1 Corinthians; and Romans. So, we add St. Paul to our not-all-inclusive list of credits for this masterpiece.

Handel, we are told, adapted musical excerpts of prior works of his own. Sources indicate also that Handel quotes the melodic opening of Martin Luther's chorale based on Psalm 130 toward the end of the work.

Each of us is challenged to share the love of God with others in our sphere of influence and according to the abilities God has given us, as did Handel and Jennens.

You will find this informational material in numerous publications and online. The imagining part you will find through your faith.

Imagine, as we consider such a heavenly scene, that Handel and Jennens, the authors of Scripture, Martin Luther, and countless others are there. They will remember with particular joy the "SDG (Soli Deo Gloria) — to God Alone the Glory" with which Handel completed his God-given mission.

I have it on good authority that when I get to heaven I can join in! Jesus, the Messiah, will be there. You, too?

Lois Sanchez is retired from clinical social work and is a wife, mother, stepmother and grandmother.

Journey Through the Psalms



Mini Bible Study Installment

PSALM 23

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.
He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Imagine a fantastic buffet. Let your mind run wild. There are no restrictions. What do you like? Pizza? Steak and seafood? Salad? Caesar's Palace?

Maybe you remember a wedding with a buffet of exotic fruit, imported cheese, and specialty cured meats.

Or maybe you would choose something with only savory pastries and sweet desserts.

Or, maybe you're just nostalgic for your college cafeteria, where, as if by magic, food appeared three times a day. No extra effort on your part, and nothing special, just plenty of food.

Now that you have that mental picture, think about this. Whatever kind of buffet it is, however many options there are, and no matter how often you can go back for more, it pales in comparison to the feast portrayed in Psalm 23.

In Psalm 23, God provides a banquet. It's a meal of abundance served in the presence of enemies, where the honored guest is anointed with oil and given an overflowing cup. There is nothing that the shepherd doesn't provide.

This feast is talked about repeatedly in the Bible, from the Garden of Eden to the feast of victory in Revelation. This feast is the abundance of God's grace and salvation for all people. It's freely given and is free to receive for anyone of faith.

Alongside this image of a great feast, we see an image of God overcoming death. The Lord is walking everywhere with us, even in the valley of the shadow of death.

It is pretty incredible to know that we are recipients of everlasting life and salvation. That's the kind of feast that is too big for imagination.

FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Read the psalm and reflect upon the following questions provided for your own personal devotions or in a short Bible study session.

1. What does it look like for you to recognize and live from a place of abundance like the feast that's freely given through Jesus?

2. In what way do a tiny cup of wine and small cube of bread become a feast?

3. Can you think of other feasts or situations of abundance described in the Bible? If you're coming up short, look at Isaiah 25:6-9, Philippians 4:10-12, and Matthew 22:1-14.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son to be our shepherd and for your abundant feast of grace and salvation. Amen.

The author of this installment, **Karen Nelson** of Bertrand, Nebraska, is general editor of Connections Online and owner of Karen Nelson Editing and Design.

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Pray: Print resources, newsletters, online aids, and prayer events can be found at prayerleague.org to help inform and encourage churches and pray-ers in praying more earnestly for the unreached world.
Grow: The Prayer League Discipleship House is an opportunity for young adults discerning their call in the global church to live in intentional Christian community and develop a personal prayer life and a heart for the nations. Learn more at prayerleague discipleshiphouse.org.
Go: Reach out at prayerleague.org to discuss your calling to the nations. The Prayer League will work with you to explore options and opportunities to serve among the unreached.

"[Before we were Christians,] we just knew that Jesus was born in Russia, and he was Russian." Alex and Diana, from Central Asia, are not the only ones who once had a grave misconception of the person of Jesus Christ. In fact, there are 7,200 people groups in the world who have never once heard the name of Jesus and the Good News that he brings.

These are the hearts for which the body of praying members at the Prayer League is in constant prayer. For nearly 90 years, the Prayer League has responded to God's call to "send out workers into the harvest field" (Luke 10:2) by persisting in expectant prayers and global service for the unreached people groups of the world, and God has answered.

From praying along a closed border in South Asia to a hospital in the region celebrating its 50th anniversary to a Discipleship House doubling in size since its beginnings, the Prayer League has seen God's faithfulness through generations and across nations, and the league continues to share stories of how God is transforming lives.

Though times may change, the commitment to the nations remains the same and guides every step forward. With a newly redesigned logo of a window shedding God's light on the world, the Prayer League recognizes that an organization is

PRAYER LEAGUE

Across Nations, Lives Transformed

not the primary end. Rather by faith, the Prayer League affirms that the end is "a great multitude ... from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9). By holding prayer events, visiting churches, sending prayer letters, and sharing stories of answered prayers on podcasts and other social platforms, the Prayer League invites others to join in this call to pray in faith, grow in faith, and go in faith.

Are you or someone you know hearing this call to pray and serve the unreached? Contact the Prayer League today to begin those prayers and conversations about where and how God may be inviting you to join his global work of drawing people from every tribe and tongue unto himself.

Savannah Clive works as a Project Specialist for the Communications team at the Prayer League and is a part of the Prayer League Discipleship House.

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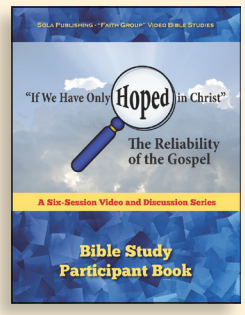
The Back Page

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On the SOWeR website, each Sunday of the church year has a page featuring a number of downloadable resources specifically for that Sunday. These include Scripture inserts, prayers, text studies, and children's bulletins, as well as worship and hymn suggestions. Also available are bulletin templates, liturgies and services that are editable for each congregation's needs.

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... AND A GAME

This month's word search is based on 1 Peter 4:10-11, the key verse for the cover page essay. Find the bold words in the grid. Reading in your browser? Work this puzzle online.

E D M S D J E S U S D O M I N I O N
F V G S P S E I L P P U S Y G O H R
B O E E S E G E U C T S S R T V T O
P Y R R V R A I B S D D E Z M T G H
M D K E A R Y K I J R C E B W R N G
W O N C V H E R S A E A D E W Q E U
H G E E G E H S W I C S E L C A R O
O N G O M C R E V H Y P I O C D T R
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V D A P F S D W L M O Y A G Q D J T
E V E R Y T H I N G L Y V O R D E R
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*As **each** has **received** a **gift**, use it to **serve** one **another**, as **good stewards** of God's **varied grace**: **whoever speaks**, as one who speaks **oracles** of **God**; whoever serves, as one who serves by the **strength** that God **supplies** — in **order** that in **everything** God may be **glorified through Jesus Christ**. To him **belong glory** and **dominion forever** and **ever**. **Amen**.*

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