

Tell out
my soul;
give my
spirit
voice

Daily Meditations for Lent
2026

Saint James Anglican Church
James Island, South Carolina



Dedication

The Saint James Anglican Lenten Booklet of 2026 is dedicated to The Reverend Louise Weld, who initiated this idea for parishioners to submit their stories and reflections on an annual theme and have them published in a booklet to be read and studied throughout Lent. This is our sixteenth year.

Introduction for Saint James Anglican Church's Lenten Booklet 2026

Worshiping through Music

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly...through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. Colossians 3:16

Music has always been important to mankind, regardless of culture, socioeconomic status, access to instruments, and musical training and talents. It can be performed indoors and outdoors--in homes, chapels, churches, and cathedrals--for all occasions. Music remains an art that bonds human beings. Whether it is listened to, sung to, or danced to, music touches hearts and minds.

God used music throughout the Bible to praise, call people to worship, soothe emotions, celebrate victories, and mourn losses. It does the same for us today. Lyrics, melodies, and harmonies come together to enhance our relationships with God. Christians adore, supplicate, and testify through music. They find affirmation and restoration in the songs, whether they are hymns that are centuries old or contemporary music of modern times. Music makes Scripture memorable and meaningful. Since these songs draw on Scripture, many lyrics are also "God-breathed." "Open the Eyes of My Heart" is based on Ephesians 1:18. "Thy Word Have I Hid in My Heart" is drawn from Psalm 119:11.

The following are some excerpts from the Bible pertaining to music:

The trumpeters and musicians joined in unison...to give praise and thanks to the Lord...The glory of the Lord filled the temple of God. 2 Chronicles 5:13-14

Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Ephesians 5:19

Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise Him...Sing to Him a new song, play skillfully, and shout for joy. Psalm 33:1-3

May you be inspired and blessed as you read the entries of your fellow parishioners professing the meanings they have found in Christian music.

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Daily Meditations for Lent 2026

Theme: Worshiping through Music

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Tell Out My Soul

By The Reverend Louise Weld

When I was the young mother of four small children, we got the news that my cousin and dearest friend (and mother of three) had been diagnosed with advanced stage leukemia. She came to visit not long after she got the news. For the two of us, having planned to rear the cousins together to be best friends just as we were, and our mothers and grandmothers before us, the news was devastating. Trusting God was a challenge: weeping, anger, disbelief, we had questions for God, many questions, and not always delivered respectfully to Him.

She and I both loved music and singing. One morning, weary of “Why this?” conversations, we sat down together at my piano with the church hymnal in front of us, and determined that we would play and sing ourselves through the entire hymnal, pages 1 to 720. We started on page one. Our families left us alone, and it was a wonderful (if hard on the ears!) few days of singing old favorites and discovering new hymns we’d never sung before. As we sang the hymns, the music began to invade our heavy spirits, not changing our circumstances but changing us in them, and restoring our faith. As has so often been the case for me, God met us in the darkness and used music to shine the light.

One of our discoveries was Hymn #438 “Tell Out My Soul.” We kept coming back to it, and pretty soon the joyful tune and words had taken up residence in us. The text by Timothy Dudley-Smith is a paraphrase of the *Magnificat*. Young Mary sings this song in Luke’s Gospel after she learns she is to conceive a child, Jesus, by the Holy Spirit.

We were two young mothers, experiencing through our hymn singing that God could and would conceive something new in us, even in the midst of heart-breaking news.

Tell out my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;
Tender to me the promise of God’s word;
In God my Savior shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out my soul, the greatness of His might
Powers and dominions lay their glory by.
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
The hungry fed the humble lifted high.

Tell out my soul the greatness of His Name!
Make known His might, the deeds His arm has done;
His mercy sure, from age to age the same;
His holy name—the Lord, the Mighty one.

Tell out my soul, the glories of His word!
Firm in His promise and His mercy sure.
Tell out, my soul the greatness of the Lord
To children’s children and forevermore.

Hymn 437, *The Hymnal* 1982

It was not the first time God had shown me His tender compassion, *his mercy sure*, nor would it be the last. The Apostle Paul asks, “*What shall we say about these things?*” What else is there to say? *Tell out my soul, the greatness of the Lord.*

Good, Good Father

By The Reverend Richard Grimball

I just saw a list of the top eight songs that turned fifty years old in 2026. I was ten years old when they were aired on radio stations, and I remember these songs as if it were yesterday: "Don't Go Breaking My Heart," "Hotel California," "Dancing Queen," "You Should Be Dancing," "Silly Love Songs," "More than a Feeling," "Oh, What a Night," and "Go Your Own Way."

It's a reminder of the influence and impact that music has on our lives. It is not random when we are in the middle of doing something, and a song pops into our heads, connecting something from our past to our present. A recent article in *Psychology Today* calls it "The Playlist in Your Brain."

There is one song I have intentionally internalized. I play it on the guitar and sing the lyrics--out of tune musically but in tune spiritually! It's called "Good, Good Father" by Chris Tomlin. I started learning and singing that song on Christmas Day 2023. My children had given me a book called *The Wim Hof Method*, and it's about the medical, psychological, and spiritual benefits of cold plunges.

I'm an extremist and an adrenaline junky, so I saw it as a challenge and said YES. That was two years ago, and almost every day I go in the ocean, up to my neck, for ten minutes and then submerge myself three times in the name of the Trinity. When the ocean water starts to drop below 55° and daily temperatures drop to a winter low of 45°, it's easy to get distracted, lose focus, and to bail out early.

I have found that when I sing "Good, Good Father," it settles my external discomfort, normalizes my breathing, and allows me to focus on the beauty that is around me--pelicans, sand pipers, sea gulls, drifting clouds in the sky, crashing waves with sea spray, the current, and shells that land on the shore at low tide and are carried out at high.

Everywhere I look, turning slowly in a circle as I sing, reminds me that our God is a God of 360°. And that music is one of His gifts, a gift that allows me to see and rest in His beauty—when internally and externally, I might be experiencing discomfort.

And I am reminded in that song by Tomlin that "God is a good, good Father, that's who He is." And that I'm loved by Him, and "that's who I am, that's who I am." Alleluia and praise the Lord!

Hymns with Meaning

By Teena Williams Martindale

Music is powerful. It can lead armies into battle, tear down walls, quiet the spirits, charm, entertain, delight, bring tears of happiness, evoke memories of the past, and most of all, it can bring joy to the heart of God through our worship.

I love you Lord and I lift my voice
To worship You O my soul rejoice,
Take joy my King in what You hear,
May it be a sweet, sweet sound to Your ears.

I loved hearing one of the precious orphans at Save R Kids in Guyana singing "Jesus Loves Me" at the top of her lungs as she swung on a rope-and-board swing. I remember my grandmother sitting on a bench by her garden in the mountains of Virginia, softly singing "The Old Rugged Cross," "Rock of Ages," "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," and others.

Our housekeeper in Charleston taught us to shout and clap and sing ancient spirituals in the Gullah Geechee tradition. I've been transported spiritually by Handel's "Messiah" performed by a full choir and orchestra.

One special memory is from Asheville, North Carolina. We had escorted teens from multiple churches in lower South Carolina on a mission trip, and we'd just left a restaurant after dinner. The park near the restaurant was a hangout for many of the homeless in the area. It was late at night, almost midnight, and there was a distraught young mother with a baby in a stroller. The baby was crying, and she was rocking the stroller back and forth, trying desperately to get the baby to sleep. Nearby there were musicians and other street entertainers busking (playing music and passing the hat for money). One of the musicians had been playing bluegrass fiddle with a little group. He noticed the mother and babe under the streetlight and went over to them. The rest of the performers stopped and listened as his bluegrass fiddle became a magnificent classical violin playing "Brahms Lullaby." I can still hear that music echoing through the dark, now quiet streets. The baby gently drifted off to sleep. The mother thanked the musician through tired tears of gratitude. Some of the performers, most of whom were homeless themselves, brought their night's earnings and placed them in the back of the stroller and offered to help her find a safe place for the night. God inhabits the music and praises of His people, and He was surely in that place on that night.

The Cross

By Maxine Swafford

When I walked into an Episcopal church, the Cathedral of Saint Philip in Atlanta, for the first time in the 1960s, my eyes were drawn to the cross centered behind the altar. It was the focal point. Today when I walk down the center aisle of Saint James Anglican Church, my eyes are drawn to the simple wooden cross hanging behind the altar.

Since that first Sunday in the 1960s, the cross has held great meaning for me. I have worn a cross daily for over sixty years, first as a Daughter of the King and now as a Daughter of the Holy Cross.

Many hymns and songs have been written to celebrate the cross. One of those is "Lift High the Cross." The words of the third verse are "O Lord once lifted on the glorious tree, as thou hast promised, draw the world to thee." The chorus says, "Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim till all the world adore His sacred name." Jesus was referring to the cross when He told a crowd in John 12:32, *And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Myself.* The cross draws us to Him.

"The Old Rugged Cross" is another meaningful hymn. I remember as a child hearing it sung in the Baptist church where we worshiped. At the time I did not appreciate the words. Today the words of that hymn humble me. "In that old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine, A wondrous beauty I see, for twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died, To pardon and sanctify me." Yes, He died so you and I could be forgiven for our sins.

The reality of Jesus's sacrifice on the cross has never been more real to me than when on Good Friday, kneeling in a darkened church, I hear the African American spiritual, "Were You There?" It asks, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord, when they nailed Him to the tree, when they laid Him in the tomb, when He rose from the dead." The first three questions do cause me to tremble, as the song says, but the last question causes me to rejoice. I Corinthians 15:55 and 57 say, *Oh death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?* But thanks be to God, Who gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Jesus overcame death when He rose from the dead.

In her book *How Sweet the Sound*, Laura Smith summarizes why the cross is important to me, to all of us. She says, "Crosses are a great reminder of who we are, Whom we follow. When we take the time to visualize what actually happened on the cross, we'll get a vivid illustration of how unfathomable His love is for us." As we move throughout this Lenten season toward Easter, let's keep our eyes focused on the cross and its meaning given to us through Scripture we read and music we hear.

Not My Will...Thine

By Gill Green

In 1974, after several miscarriages, I was able to carry a baby past what the doctors considered the “danger time.” However, at twenty weeks, the baby died, and after a surgical removal, I was angry, hurt, and confused. I screamed at God, “You’re not fair! I wanted that baby.” I held my hurt until one day our pastor came to visit me, bringing with him a new worship album, *The Presence of Your Spirit* by Len Magee--Dove music 1974. The singer was a man with whom I had done youth camps and who had come frequently to our church to do worship services with my pre-teen youth.

One song on the album gave me a wake-up call; it was called “Not My Own.” The first verse is as follows:

The Garden of Eden saw Adam and Eve
The sin they did there caused all men to grieve
Faced with a choice to rebel or obey
Hear them say, “Want my own, I want my own
I want my own will not Thine.”

After listening to that song over and over, brokenhearted, I finally got my act together! Thank God for His mercy and forgiveness, and for the old hymn which Frances Ridley Havergal wrote 100 years earlier, which has since become my daily prayer:

Take my life and let it be
Consecrated Lord, to Thee
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.
Take my hands and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my will and make it Thine
It shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart it is Thine own;
It shall be Thy royal throne.
Take my love, my Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself and I will be
Ever, only, all for Thee.

Take my voice and let me sing
Always only for my King.
Take my lips and let them be
Filled with messages from Thee.
Take my silver and my gold
Not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect and use
Every power as Thou shall choose.

Hymn 707, *The Hymnal* 1982

The Word Made Flesh

By Fred Whittle

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through Him. He was not the light but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him. (John 1:1-10)

In John 1:1 “logos (λόγος)” is translated into English as “the Word,” and we easily connect it to “The Word made flesh,” our Redeemer and Savior, The Messiah Christ Jesus of Nazareth. The early Christians and those Jews dispersed in the Fertile Crescent and Asia Minor knew of “the Word’s” pregnant meaning in their Hellenistic Jewish environment. Those Greek-speaking learned Jewish, *cum* Christians reading John’s Gospel, would have connected John’s unequivocal stipulation that his Lord--Jesus of Nazareth--was the Christ--present at the Beginning--for all time--the divine Creator God with us --Emanuel. Logos for the Greek world was and is our only mediator with the Father, per Scripture brought beautifully into our Sunday liturgy. Jesus is the flesh of the Godhead’s knowledge, wisdom, and truth, which is outside of time, very personal, and devoid of all chance.

In the fullness of time is when Scripture states that God sent His Son, born of a woman. (Galatians 4:4) We use that term, understanding it to be when the world was ready to have the Messiah usher in The Kingdom of God and to be the Omega of our sin offerings, taking on “the sin of the whole world” as a propitiation for us on the Cross. *It is finished!* (John 19: 30) Thus ended the power of the sacrificial system as payment for sin. After the Cross, Christ Jesus’ obedience to death and His resurrection are the invoice for sin returned “paid in full.” Glory to God in the Highest!

“The Great Reformer” Martin Luther wrote “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” – one of the more popular hymns – and opened the last stanza with “That Word above all earthly powers no thanks to them abideth; the Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him who with us sideth.” Praise God that we have our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ on our side when facing the world!

During Lent, let us focus on that sacrificial gift borne in unspeakable suffering for the salvation of the world. Let us also focus on “The Word” as our connection to our heavenly Father and to Jesus at His right hand advocating for us.

Music to My Ears

By Rosie Colson

I have been listening to His Radio (100.5 FM) for the last ten years after being told about it by a dear friend. It is now the only station that I listen to in my car. Not only the songs that are played uplift my spirits; the hosts are also very upbeat and encouraging through their prayers. The joy they spread is contagious.

When the songs come on, it never fails that they are just the words I need to hear at the moment, and I find myself singing at the top of my lungs. It reminds me of being in the shower, and no one else can hear me singing.

I also have an antique radio in my kitchen, which stays on that station as well. I have been known to stop what I am doing at the moment and start singing and dancing with my hands held high! I know most of the songs by heart just as I did back with songs when I was in high school. However, like back then, I can never remember the artists, so I have to look up some of my favorites,

"Greater" by Mercy Me started out as one of my favorites, and then the list began to grow. "O' Lord" by Lauren Daigle reminds me of the strength that comes from God by standing up for what is right. "The Father's House" by Cory Asbury and "Just Be Held" by Casting Crowns always give me a feeling of God's comfort and love. "Don't Stop Praying" by Matthew West gives me the strength to never give up hope and just keep on believing. And, of course, if I want to hear some boogie music, there is "Old Church Choir" by Zack Williams; he also has a great video for it.

I could go on and on because there are so many great songs that I love to hear, but if I had to pick an all-time favorite, it would have to be "Eye of the Storm" by Ryan Stevenson. The chorus reminds me that no matter what I am going through at the time, I know that God is with me, and He will never let me go!

In the eye of the storm, You remain in control.
In the middle of the war, You guard my soul.
You alone are the anchor when my sails are torn.
Your love surrounds me in the eye of the storm.

The battle belongs to You, Lord. Amen!

It's the Sound of Music

By Lillie McGougan

I had never sung in a choir, but when George Mims, a real choir master, came to Saint Philip's Church, it was a life changing event for me.

George said to me, "Why don't you sing in the choir?" I said, "I have never sung in a choir." His next question was, "You have a diaphragm, don't you?" Of course, I didn't have a clue why he asked me that. He said, "If you do, I can get sound out of you." I thought about what he said and answered, "I do have one."

That began a different time in church for me. I knew if I was going to sing, the Holy Spirit would have to help me. Lots of people with good voices joined the choir. I always had someone on my left side that had a good voice, and that person helped me to stay on key.

As time went on, I realized how singing was really praising the Lord, and when we sang for the church services, it made me feel closer to God.

A real blessing happened after Hurricane Hugo hit Charleston in 1989. Jane Pauley of NBC recorded five churches in the country. Saint Philip's was one of the churches chosen. The choir practiced for the video. One part of the video was Mary, Joseph, and Jesus being led into the church by Preston Hipp, the perfect angel. The choir followed him in singing. I could not believe what God had done in my life, a non-choir person on national television. I still watch the video and appreciate the special sound of the music that drew all of us closer to God. I learned music is a pathway to God.

When I left Saint Philip's and returned to Saint James, I felt confident that I could be a choir member there as well. At Saint James, I was blessed to join Pat Gould's choir, and she brought sounds out of me that I didn't know I had. We sang contemporary songs and hymns. That time in the choir brought more growth for me as a Christian, singing to God and entering His throne room.

I think singing in choirs has prepared me to understand all the music in heaven when I go to meet my Lord and Savior. George and Pat were blessings in that preparation. I'm ready for the promotion to God's wonderful choir with my diaphragm working.

I believe God uses all kinds of ways to grow us as Christians. Singing is not something that I thought would grow me as a Christian, but God knew it would. I still sing, but my singing is not as good as it used to be. Now it is merely a joyful noise to the Lord. To Him be the glory for using me as a choir member!

Onward Christian Soldiers

By Dick Bartels

Growing up on Long Island, New York, I attended Our Savior's Lutheran Church where we frequently sang "Onward Christian Soldiers." The hymn has been especially meaningful to me all my life. It was written in 1865 by Sabine Baring-Gould, originally for a children's procession in the English countryside, from one village to another, to join other school children. However, since I served in the Air Force for twenty-two years, I have found the martial rhythm appealing to adults.

When researching the author, I learned that he was a clergyman, educator, and author of about eighty-five books. Irony exists in the fact that Baring-Gould is best known today for this song that he supposedly wrote hastily and thought that it would never be published.

Based on the Scripture 2 Timothy 2:3, "Onward Christian Soldiers" symbolizes Christian unity and perseverance. Soldiers do indeed have to be bonded and steadfast to face foes. Many have worn a cross, carried a Bible, said fervent prayers, and demonstrated a love for their comrades and their country.

However, those who have never worn a soldier's uniform can still identify with the lyrics. Christians fight so that a fallen world will know the light of Jesus. Christians know to fight spiritual warfare against the enemy of Satan.

The lyrics portray "Christ, the royal master," leading "brothers" who [tread] "where the saints have trod." He portrays the "Church of God" as not being divided but "all one body," "one in hope and doctrine." He states that royalty and kingdoms are not permanent, but "the church of Jesus [is] constant [and] will remain...because we have Christ's own promise."

Many soldiers sing as they march or go into battle. The fourth stanza says that this united body will blend their voices "in the triumph song." The "glory, laud, and honor" are not for man but for "Christ the King; this through countless ages saints and angels sing."

My Christian upbringing in this Lutheran church was impacted not only by this favorite hymn but also by the church leaders. One member, in particular, was influential in my youth. He was my Sunday school teacher as well as my Scout master. The words in this hymn and the words from this man have come to mind many times when I have needed "brothers" with whom I could move "onward" and persevere in tough times both in my military and civilian life.

Sing to the Lord a New Song

By Jay Millen

As we begin this Lenten season with a focus on music, I immediately go to the Psalms, which are both songs and poems that exhort us to sing. However, that is a problem for me. I love music, and I am in awe of musicians, especially those who sing well, but I have absolutely zero musical ability. I can't sing a note on key or play any instrument from a kazoo to a grand piano. It was humbling, sometimes humiliating, when I was younger. As I have grown older, the humility is still there but not the humiliation. That comes from an experience I had as a young boy at Saint James Episcopal Church in Ormond Beach, Florida, with my grandmother.

One Sunday in the Easter season, when I was seven or eight years old, we were singing a belting hymn – “Onward Christian Soldiers.” I was way off key, singing at the top of my lungs, more like shouting “with the cross of Jesus going on before, Like a mighty army Moves the Church of God”—as if there were no tomorrow. I could tell my grandmother was uncomfortable, but I was puzzled about why. As I looked around, a lot of other people looked uncomfortable, too. My grandmother leaned over and quietly asked me to sing to myself. Then it dawned on me that my voice might be bad, really bad, like especially bad. I stopped all at once. I was embarrassed, not just for myself but also for my grandmother. I vowed then and there--no more singing – ever.

The service continued until the dismissal. I didn't really hear much more of it after that. I couldn't wait to rush out of the church and leave my embarrassment behind. My grandmother always stopped to speak with the Rector, and that Sunday was no exception. As we reached him, I looked down at the ground and apologized for my bad singing. Then something happened that I would have never expected from this stern patrician priest. He knelt down, put his hand on my shoulder, and told me to look up at him, so I did.

There are not many things I can remember about being seven or eight years old, but I will never forget what he said to me that morning. He looked into my eyes with a kind smile and said, “Don't ever forget this, young man. The Lord loves your voice, and He loves when we sing to Him. Don't ever stop singing to Him or *about* Him.”

Now when I sing in church, I always look around a bit to make sure everyone is “safe,” and then I *sing to the Lord a new song*. (Psalm 96:1) I always encourage others who don't share that musical gift to join me.

Songs of Knowledge

By Caroline McQueeney

Sometimes when I pray, I hear answers in songs or phrases from songs. I call these “songs of knowledge.”

My best prayers are usually in the middle of the night when I pour out my worries, my gratitude, and my questions to the Lord and wait for anything He may want to say to me.

Often times, a song begins. It may be an entire song that drifts through my mind, a tune I haven’t heard in years, words I didn’t know I remembered, or just a single phrase from a song. At first I think it’s just my brain being busy feeling the silence, but then I notice how the words land exactly where they’re needed. The words usually remind me to know I am loved, to be patient, to trust, and to not be afraid. If only I had journaled all the songs the Lord has given me!

One that I distinctly remember is the Bob Marley song that says “Don’t worry about a ting cause every little ting is gonna be alright.” This was spoken to me when I was expressing concern to the Lord over a CT scan that I was going to have the next day. Even while I was in the CT machine, my mind was singing and that song and rejoicing. It has become my mantra whenever I face possible trouble.

The songs don’t shout. They don’t demand attention. They arrive very gently, speaking truth and wisdom into my spirit. I realize that God knows me well enough to speak in a language my heart already understands.

Sometimes it’s a hymn I learned long ago or a popular song from the past, which often times will play on the radio the very next day after I hear it in my prayers.

These single phrases or songs can follow me through the day, nudging me toward courage, forgiveness, or peace, as if the Lord is saying, “Let Me sing this truth into you until you believe it.” In those moments, I understand that God does not always speak in sentences. Sometimes He speaks in refrains.

I am convinced that He answers prayers with melodies because music can reach places words alone cannot. So now when I pray, I listen for the song beneath the silence, and when it comes, I smile because I know it’s Him reminding me that I am heard, I am known, and I am never praying alone. Thanks be to God!

Come Down, O Love Divine

By Francie Egleston

“Come down, O Love divine, seek Thou this soul of mine, and visit it with Thine own ardor glowing;
O Comforter, draw near, within my heart appear, and kindle it, Thy holy flame bestowing.”

Hymn 516, *The Hymnal* 1982

My father began as a church organist when he was only sixteen years old and continued in this vocation into his late seventies when trembling hands caused him to retire. His mother sang in the church choir until her old-age voice also began to tremble. I was blessed with exposure to hymns my entire life.

I remember so well going for long car rides as a child in the then undeveloped areas around Mt. Pleasant. My grandfather was the village doctor with his office attached to their home via the dining room door. He could never get away from his patients who would show up at all hours. Therefore, on many Sunday afternoons, we would all pile into the car and take my grandparents for drives in the “country.” Inevitably these car rides would be the place of hymn singing.

This is where many heart songs easily became part of my memory. So very many hymns are my favorites. Their poetic prayers and praises and Bible verses continually bless meeven as I ride my bike in the mornings and no human audience can hear my voice. “Come down, O Love divine” is a prayer that most often pops into my head and heart. May you also be drawn to Jesus by the prayers of the hymns.

And Grace Will Lead Me Home

By Sue Morrison

In the early spring of 2007, my mother was in the final fight against a rare cancer; one that usually attacks the lungs had attacked her small intestines. The last Friday night in February, as I was driving our high school's National Ocean Science Bowl Team to Columbia for the state competition, my dad called to tell me that Mom was having emergency surgery but to continue with the students for the competition. About 11:00 PM he called to say that the surgery was more extensive than had been expected and to come to Florida as soon as possible. My brother and I arrived during the night and spent time with Mom in the ICU over the next couple of days. She stabilized, and dad sent us home as we both were still working.

The following Sunday morning Dad called--Mom had passed away about 4:00 AM. I said that I would be there as soon as I could pack a bag and get on the road. Dad said, "No, I need to be alone, and I'm going to church this morning. It's where I need to be. And you should go as well." I didn't really feel like going to church but decided to do as I was told. I wasn't paying much attention to the service that Sunday until the congregation stood to sing "Amazing Grace." What were the odds of that song being played on that Sunday morning? I lost it and had to go outside to sit on the concrete bench on the porch of the old church. I sat there crying, not just because I was sad but also because the song was so beautiful and perfect. I'll never forget the way Chris Walchesky played the song on the organ that morning and how it spoke to me. During the last stanza, I knew that my father was correct: Church was exactly where I needed to be that morning. "And grace will lead me home."

Amazing Grace by John Newton (1779)

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found; Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me, His Word my hope secures;
He will my Shield and Portion be As long as life endures.

Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail, And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess, within the veil, A life of joy and peace.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow, The sun forbear to shine;
But God, who called me here below, Will be forever mine.

When we've been there ten thousand years, Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise Than when we'd first begun.

Hymn 671, *The Hymnal* 1982

Psalm 91: On Eagles' Wings

By Pat Majors

As many of you know, I'm a fan of contemporary Christian music. One of many songs that has spoken to me is "Psalm 91 (On Eagles' Wings)" recorded by Shane and Shane in their album, *Psalms Vol. 2*. Since Psalm 91 was studied by our members in Friday Morning Women's Bible Study this year, I thought this was a good place to begin.

Briefly, Michael Joncas wrote "On Eagles' Wings" in 1976 to comfort a friend whose father had suffered a heart attack. Still, it wasn't until 1979 that Joncas recorded and published his work—just prior to his ordination as Roman Catholic priest. Since then, it has been sung at funerals, baptisms, and weddings. Significantly, it was sung at the televised memorial following the Oklahoma City Bombing in 1995 and later at funerals for the victims of 9/11.

As you can see from the lyrics below, Joncas paraphrased three segments of "Psalm 91" and created a chorus that drew from *Isaiah*, *Exodus*, *Daniel*, and *Matthew*.

You who dwell in the shelter of the Lord
Who abide in His shadow for life
Say to the Lord, "My refuge,
My rock in Whom I trust"

The snare of the fowler will never capture you
And famine will bring you no fear
Under His wings your refuge
His faithfulness your shield

(Chorus)
And He will raise you up on eagles' wings
Bear you on the breath of dawn
Make you to shine like the sun
And hold you in the palm
Of His hand

You need not fear the terror of the night
Nor the arrow that flies by day
Though thousands fall about you
Near you, it shall not come

The Scriptures that Joncas used are, as follow. The italicized phrases are Biblical passages embedded in the song's lyrics:

- But they who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; *they shall mount up with wings like eagles.* (Isaiah 40:31)
- You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how *I bore you on eagles' wings* and brought you to Myself. (Exodus 19:4)
- Then the *righteous will shine like the sun* in the kingdom of their Father. (Matthew 13:43) (Jesus' explanation of the parable of the weeds)
- And those who are wise *shall shine like the brightness of the sky above.* (Daniel 12:13)

Additionally, the chorus reminded me of two more Scriptures.

- *If I take the wings of the morning [i.e. breath of dawn] even there Your hand shall lead me.* (Psalm 139:9-10)
- *But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.* (Proverbs 4:18)

Now, for a moment, let's go back to the opening stanza (paraphrased from Psalm 91). This is a reminder that God's promise of protection is for those "who dwell in the shelter of the Lord," those who *believe* He is our refuge, our rock in Whom we trust.

Hymns in the Fort Lawn Methodist Church

By Eddie Anthony

While growing up, my brother Steve and I would spend the summers with my grandparents in Fort Lawn, South Carolina, working on the farm. This small town is located in Chester County between Columbia and Rock Hill, South Carolina. Its population in the 1960s was 192 folks. Fort Lawn had one caution light. For the most part, it was a farming community. My grandfather was a pretty large dairy farmer at the time. Steve and I were to “help” on the farm, along with my cousin.

There were three churches in Fort Lawn: the Methodist, the Presbyterian, and the Baptist. My grandparents were Methodist and attended church regularly, taking Steve and me along, too.

On Sunday mornings the voices of the Fort Lawn Methodist Church congregation would fill the small sanctuary. The hymns were known so well that hymnals were rarely opened.

The following hymns were my favorite: “The Old Rugged Cross,” “Rock of Ages,” “Blessed Assurance,” “He Walks with Me,” “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” “Just a Closer Walk with Thee,” “Amazing Grace,” and “How Great Thou Art.” When I hear these hymns today, I am reminded of my grandparents and those summers on the farm.

Welcome Happy Morning

By Alice Anthony

The Easter hymn, “Welcome Happy Morning,” was written in the 6th century in Latin by the Italian poet and bishop Venantius Fortunatus. It was translated by hymnologist John Ellerton.

“Welcome Happy Morning” is a music memory of my growing up years at Saint David's in Cheraw, South Carolina. This hymn was the processional hymn every Easter morning. It is probably still used as much today sixty years after my time in the choir. Traditions die hard in that little Southern town.

Don't get ideas of me joining the choir at Saint James Anglican. When I attended The Little Red School House (kindergarten), my teacher, Mrs. Ellie Funderburk, wrote “Alice cannot carry a tune” on my report card. I was a member of Saint David's choir only to swell the ranks.

But, oh how I remember those Easter mornings watching the crucifer (usually my cousin Brent) step into the nave of the church from the vestibule and lift the cross, tied with lilies, as high as he could. As I followed the cross into the sanctuary and down the aisle toward the altar, I knew that I was part of something glorious.

Holy, Holy, Holy

By Virginia Bartels

Each time my congregation and I sing the hymn “Holy, Holy, Holy,” memories bathe me with not only a renewed love for the Trinity but also a love for my Grama Gregory. When I was five years old, I lived with my maternal grandparents. At the time, I could enroll in first grade in their home state of Ohio but not where I was living in Alabama. In addition to my parents and grandparents thinking that I was ready for first grade schoolwork, they wanted to spare me from moving from one school to another mid-year because my father was in the navy and knew he would soon be transferred.

At the time, my grandfather, Rev. Leo Gregory, was retired from his ministry at a large church (First Christian Church of Stow) and had accepted the position of an interim pastor in a small church. Sunday mornings, using the sidewalk in front of houses that had been built decades before, my grandmother and I walked from my grandfather’s and her house to the church where he was preaching. We enjoyed the stroll, whether we were admiring fall leaves or spring flowers. In the winter we donned thick coats, galoshes, and gloves and did not mind trudging along in the snow.

Inside the church I nestled up against my grandmother, and we fixed our eyes on our beloved minister. I would sometimes look up at her, noticing her thinning gray hair under her stylish hat. Always dressed as a lady, she radiated love for fellow worshippers and her Savior. Even her sky-blue eyes seemed to smile. Almost every Sunday, we sang “Holy, Holy, Holy,” perhaps because it was such a popular hymn in many denominations--or perhaps it was one of the few hymns that the organist felt confident in playing. We never tired of this profound hymn written by the Anglican bishop Reginald Heber and published posthumously in 1826.

As a first grader knowing how to read text from one line to the next, I initially got confused when I tried to follow the words of a hymn. My grandmother taught me how to “read” a hymn, moving from stanza to stanza, verse by verse.

The song taught me about God. He was and is and always will be “holy,” “Almighty,” “merciful,” “perfect in love and purity.” I learned that this God deserved our praise so “all ...works shall praise [His] name in earth, and sky, and sea.” I even started to grasp the complex idea that “God [is] three persons, [a] Trinity.” Saints adore Him. He is “evermore.” What profound and indelible facts made on a young, impressionable mind such as mine at the time! My precious grandmother is now among the angels and saints with the “Lord God Almighty,” but I still think of her each time I sing this hymn today. I am no longer the little girl physically sidled up next to her, but somehow our souls still seem connected through this song and through our Savior.

Hymn 362, *The Hymnal* 1982

Precious Lord, Take My Hand

By Donna Lewis

I asked my niece, Christina, to sing “Precious Lord, Take My Hand” at my husband Al’s funeral. That song meant so much to me, especially the words in the second and third lines: “Lead me on, help me stand. I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.” Al had grown so weak from cancer that he could no longer stand on his own.

One day, when his spirits were especially low, I asked him if it was because he had cancer. He replied, “No. I’m depressed because I no longer have control of my life.” Al didn’t often talk about God or his faith, but in his final weeks he kept the Bible by his chair. I trust in my heart that he read it and found peace, knowing his eternal life awaited him in heaven.

I had met Al when we were both in our late teens. We were part of a singing group called “The Sounds of America,” which had about sixty young people from Charlotte and the surrounding areas, including Gastonia, where Al lived at the time. We sang patriotic and folk songs at festivals, military bases, and community events. Back then, we didn’t date one-on-one—we double-dated, and I was seeing a friend of his. Eventually, we aged out of the group and went our separate ways. Both of us experienced failed marriages that ended in divorce.

Years later, at “The Sounds of America” twenty-year reunion, Al and I reconnected. That reunion brought us back into each other’s lives, and our renewed friendship blossomed into love. We married in 1993.

Fourteen years later, in May of 2007, Al was diagnosed with kidney cancer. By the time it was discovered, the cancer was already stage four. He endured three difficult years of chemotherapy and suffering before passing away peacefully in April 2010.

Christina, a gifted singer, had moved to New York to pursue her dream of becoming an opera singer. While her opera career never fully took off, her voice remained extraordinary. At Al’s memorial service, everyone was deeply moved by her performance. When I had arrived at the funeral, I discovered that one of the funeral directors was John Burchette—our former director from “The Sounds of America.” Also in attendance was Thomas Moore, Al’s longtime friend from the group. Thomas is well known throughout Charlotte for his remarkable singing and his work with children.

After the service and visitation, Thomas stayed to speak with Christina. He sat at the piano, and together they sang “Precious Lord, Take My Hand.” The very next day, my father-in-law attended a funeral in Gastonia. He later told me that Thomas Moore had been there—and once again, he sang “Precious Lord.”

I remember Rev. Arthur Jenkins saying that there are no coincidences—only God’s perfect timing. Everything in my life seemed to come together: the reunion of “The Sounds of America,” Al’s returning to my life, and the presence of Thomas Moore and John Burchette at the funeral service. In addition, my beautiful niece Christina sang that powerful song. God is good.

Embracing the Light

By Marcia Porter

As the melodies of this heartfelt song, “Embracing the Light,” resonate within me, I find myself drawn closer to the essence of Christ’s love and sacrifice. This season of Lent unites us into a sacred space of reflection, transformation, and hope. For example, I cling to the hope of recovery for my daughter, who is fighting a rare blood cancer.

This song fills my heart with an uplifting spirit, reminding me that God is my guiding light through the shadows of my struggles. I try and find quiet moments of prayer and contemplation, which inspire me to embrace the call to follow Him more closely. The following words do this for me:

“I accept the Lord, my struggle is over, this peace is mine, embracing the light of God’s love.”

“Moment I whispered Your name in the night, You washed all the darkness away with Your light, and now I stand in the sunlight, darkness is gone—found my strength in Your light, and peace is truly mine.”

These lyrics remind me that even in moments of doubt and despair, there is hope. He is with me. The lyrics also echo the promise of redemption and grace. They remind me to shed my burdens and see His divine love.

In 2026 I want my actions to mirror the love I feel in my heart and bring light to those around me. This Lent I want a song of hope, the love of Christ, and the presence of His light in my heart and home.

Sunday, March 8, 2026

Genesis 18: 1-15 Psalms 56, 57 Luke 15: 11-end

Missing the Point

By Jane Read

“The overwhelming, never ending reckless love of God... chases me down... till I’m found....”

As a musician, I was classically trained, which focused on the right notes at the right time with proper expression and following the director. I loved it and never questioned it – even in church, but God was about to change that. He gave me my love of music and singing, and He was ready to show me what it was for.

Sometime in my late 20’s or early 30’s, our church had begun to introduce contemporary worship music in our services. I was unfamiliar with most of the music and didn’t really care for it. To my mind, it would have been great at camp or a retreat, but it felt out of place in church. I had been taught that church was to be “dignified and reverent.” This new music seemed neither.

During this same period, God had begun working in my life through small groups, Bible studies, and new friends. Then, to my surprise, I felt God clearly calling me to attend our new contemporary service. I didn’t really want to do this; I told Him that this new music was fine for some but not for me. He insisted, so I went. At first I was uncomfortable as people around me raised their hands in the air and swayed as they sang. I waited.

“Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place; He comes to cleanse and heal, to minister His grace....”

It began slowly. Then God broke open my heart and showed me how to truly worship Him. He freed my heart to worship, and as He often does with me, He used music as the vehicle. I had made an idol out of the type of music I sang and my ability to perform it. I had put music and myself before God. I had been missing the point – the music wasn’t the point – He was and always will be.

After God was satisfied that I was where He wanted me to be, He called me back to the traditional service. Now, I could weep with joy, sorrow, or adoration while singing hymns and anthems I had known all my life as well as the myriad of new songs I had begun to know and love. Contemporary was not any better or worse than traditional for worship or bringing me closer to God – it was about my heart. The Holy Spirit breathed new life into me as I sang. Thanks be to God--He doesn’t leave us where we are. He keeps calling us to Himself. We are called to worship.

“At the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow; every tongue confess Him King of glory now....”

“Reckless Love” by Cory Asbury

“Be Still for the Presence” by David J. Evans

“At the Name of Jesus” Hymn 435, *The Hymnal* 1982

It Is Well with My Soul

By Carl and Gill Green

In October 2016, Carl had emergency surgery and was sent home about a week later after the doctor assured us the issue was fixed. In early November, it became clear that the problem was not fixed, and we went to the emergency room at 1 a.m. Once again, he had to have emergency surgery, and I found myself alone in the surgical waiting room at 4 a.m. I had decided not to disturb our family until a more reasonable hour. Knowing Scooter Barnett was always up praying at 5:00, I decided to email her, hoping the Lord would prompt her to check her email so she could notify the prayer team of the situation. Upon opening my phone, I found an email from our daughter Rebecca. While Rebecca is often up in the early hours, she is not usually doing email at that time! Upon opening it, I read "FOR DAD" in the subject line. Curious, I continued to read and found the beautiful words Horatio Spafford had written for the hymn "It Is Well with My Soul." While we had known the words for many years, God obviously knew both Carl and I needed to be reminded of them on that day at that time!

For those who don't know the story, which is widely available on the internet and bears reading, the author Horatio lost his entire family in a horrible disaster, and God prompted him to pen these words as a testimony to God's mercy and grace in our worst times of trouble.

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control.
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part, but the whole
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more.
Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord, oh my soul!

Refrain: It is well...with my soul..It is well, it is well with my soul.

This Is My Father's World

By Teena Williams Martindale

In the beginning God spoke, and there was Creation. Christ holds all things together and sustains Creation.

Listen! God sings over us. You can hear His voice in the laughter of children, in the wind, in the whale's song, in the sound of the waves, in silence.

He is near. God is with us.
This is my Father's world,
And to my listening ears
All nature sings, and round me rings
The music of the spheres.
This is my Father's world:
I rest me in the thought
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas;
His hand the wonders wrought.

This is my Father's world,
The birds their carols raise,
The morning light, the lily white,
Declare their Maker's praise.
This is my Father's world,
He shines in all that's fair;
In the rustling grass I hear Him pass;
He speaks to me everywhere.

This is my Father's world.
O let me ne'er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the ruler yet.
This is my Father's world:
Why should my heart be sad?
The Lord is King; let the heavens ring!
God reigns; let the earth be glad!

By Maltbie D. Babcock, Hymn 651, *The Hymnal* 1982

Some Biblical and Church History

By Beau Booker

Literate cultures worldwide from their earliest decipherable writings share the intimate incorporation of music into worship, presumably first voice alone with instruments added as they were invented or adopted.

Genesis 4, the story of Cain and Abel, tells of Adam's five great-grandsons, Jubal, "the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe," and Tubal-cain, "the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron."

After their deliverance crossing the Red Sea, *Moses and the people of Israel sang [a] song to the LORD* (Exodus 15:1), and *Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing. And Miriam sang to them.* (Exodus 15: 20-21)

King David, *a man after God's own heart* (1 Samuel 13:14 and Acts 13:22) and himself a composer and instrumentalist, is credited with formally integrating music into regular Judaic worship around 1000 BC, and we incorporate Psalms he composed into our own worship three millennia later.

Music, though a crucial element of Second Temple Judaism, appears only once in the Gospels, yet that's at a critical juncture, the final corporate act in the Upper Room before the walk to Gethsemane and Our Lord's betrayal: *And when they had sung a hymn, they went to the Mount of Olives.* (Matthew 26:30)

Christianity and music have been ever intertwined, from martyrs singing on the way to death to monastic chanting, from the invention of the pipe organ and various instruments and their refinements to the development of musical notation better expressing the composer's vision, from the institutionalized choir to vernacular hymnody as a Protestant poetic genre, and on and on to 21st century praise music.

Sacred music flourished in the Renaissance and then came the Baroque: the Scarlattis, Handel, Telemann, so very many, but no greater genius than Johann Sebastian Bach.

Lay aside his liturgical works in Latin and the motets and four-part chorales. Lay aside his sublime Christmas, Easter, and Ascension Day oratorios and monumental St. Matthew's and St. John's passions for Good Friday. Over three remarkably productive years 300 years ago inaugurating a 27-year appointment as Thomaskantor (official, governmentally funded director of church music) of the Lutheran mercantile city of Leipzig in the Electorate of Saxony, he composed, rehearsed, and presented a new sacred cantata every single Sunday, save during Lent, featuring noted soloists, a renowned choir, and professional instrumentalists, most at minimum fifteen minutes' duration.

Many survive and their scriptural underpinnings for specific Sundays correspond to our own liturgical calendar today.

I begin each Sunday with at least one of the liturgically appropriate cantatas and have assembled what I believe the "best" available version of each, as of all Bach's surviving works. The weekly discipline is immensely helpful in focusing on the morning's worship to follow. Though wholly lacking German, it's the music itself, composed with specific Scripture in mind, I find transcendent, not obscure Saxon verse.

Blessed Jesus, Lead and Love Us Still

By Fred Whittle

"Savior like a Shepherd Lead Us" (Dorothy Ann Thrupp, 1779-1847)

Savior, like a shepherd lead us,
Much we need Thy tender care;
In Thy pleasant pastures feed us,
For our use Thy folds prepare:
Blessèd Jesus, blessèd Jesus,
Thou hast bought us, Thine we are...

I like to think that the Lord announced the arrival of His Son our Savior to lowly shepherds because that is the model of sacrificial leadership and living that He wanted us to model.

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. (Luke 2:8-14)

Thus, begins the momentous Christmas proclamation of the Angel of the Lord coming to Earth to visit lowly country shepherds in the fields. We know that the shepherds took what was told them into action and went *even unto Bethlehem to see that which the Lord had made known to [them]* Matthew 2:15. After seeing Jesus, Mary, and Joseph and relaying what they had been told regarding Jesus as "Christ the Lord," they returned to the fields with praise and glory to God for their gift of being chosen to witness in Word and in the flesh. But, what might have been their seeking many years hence, perhaps from those same field slopes?

Thirty-three years after the Nativity, they might have been thinking about their capital city Jerusalem, 5.2 miles away, a mere two-hour walk for a fit traveler of the 1st Century. Might they have heard rumors of a great rabbi declaring Himself Messiah and performing miraculous healings and other acts which confounded witnesses?

Were they looking towards Jerusalem and Calvary and seeing a great darkness overcome it from noon until 3:00 PM (Matthew 27:45)? Was there a great shock wave when the temple curtain was rent in two, and the earth shook, and the rocks split (Matthew 27:51)? Since the Gospel writers' witnesses in and around Christ's ministry might not have met the same shepherds in 33 AD, might the Angel of the Lord have returned to the same shepherds and told them, also, *It is finished?* (John 19:30) What must they have been thinking, reflecting on what the Angel told them at the birth of Jesus Christ?

We have the awesome privilege of reading Scripture and engaging in the worship of our King Jesus Christ. We also have our imaginations to fire a renewed spirit of love for the songs of praise given to us for the very same worship in which the Nativity visitors engaged. While we do not have Jesus here incarnate, we ought to feel His Spirit's presence among us as we walk with Him as witnesses in the Spirit.

"Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us" continued:

Early let us seek Thy favor,
Early let us do Thy will;
Blessed Lord and only Savior,
With Thy love our bosoms fill:
Blessèd Jesus, blessèd Jesus,
Thou hast loved us, love us still...

Hymn 708, *The Hymnal* 1982

Roses Will Bloom Again

By Stephanie Wyatt

While growing up, I was fortunate enough to spend a lot of time at my grandparents' house. My grandmother absolutely loves the Gaither vocal band and had what I can only assume is every program and performance of theirs that was available on VHS. One was always playing at any given time. We came to know all the songs and all the friends of Bill and Gloria Gaither as if they were our own.

One of my favorite songs was called "Roses Will Bloom Again" by Sherri Easter. The chorus is as follows:

Roses will bloom again.

Just wait and see.

Don't mourn what might have been.

Only God knows how and when

Roses will bloom again.

While watching those tapes at my grandmother's house, I thought it was a beautiful song. As an adult, the song means so much more. All have experienced hardships in their lives--times in which they can't see the light at the end of the tunnel.

When I have had those kinds of experiences, I find that this song always pops into my head. It is so encouraging to be reminded of the fact that no matter how difficult things may seem, God has a plan. You are not alone. Roses will bloom again.

Colossians 3:16

By Brenda Clarey

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Colossians 3:16)

Music has always been a big part of my family. My dad played trumpet, and my mother played piano. He played during special occasions at Saint Matthews Lutheran Church where my mother was raised. On their first date, they rode by her church, and my dad informed her that he played there, and she informed him that that was her church. Years later they were married there.

I grew up always singing at the Franke Home--all the songs I had learned in choir. Having those roots were important, but it wasn't until I was born again that I truly knew that the hymns and praise songs would bring me closer to God. I used to look at singing as a performance for others, but that view has changed. Now I am singing for my God, to praise Him and to give Him the glory.

Playing the guitar and singing with my sister brought the love of hymns and spiritual songs deeper in my heart. I grew stronger in my faith because most of the songs we sang were based on Scripture. Singing these songs helped me memorize so much of the Bible, God's word. I always put a musical note next to the verse to remind me that I can sing that Scripture, too.

Colossians 3:16 is one of my favorite verses because I want God's word to dwell in me so I can be filled with the Holy Spirit each day. When I taught preschool, I had my students memorize a new Scripture with music each month. We can learn Scripture more easily if we sing it.

I listen to a podcast entitled "Shane and Shane" each day. The whole podcast is based on Colossians 3:16. The musicians sing a different hymn or praise song each day because of that verse. It is all based on the truth of God's word and how we are blessing the heart of God when we sing for Him. How sweet! I want to bless Him like that when I sing to Him every day of my life.

Lord of All Creation

By Jay Millen

Contemporary Christian music has been a significant influence on both my spiritual and everyday lives for most of my adult life. One band that has had the biggest impact is Third Day. These musicians aren't just a Christian band; their portfolio music is quite simply a modern hymnal in my opinion. One of my favorites is "God of Wonders," a song that is now nearly twenty-five years old and still resonates today.

Lord of all creation
Lord of water, earth and sky
The heavens are your Tabernacle
Glory to the Lord on High

Lord of heaven and earth (four times)

Hallelujah! To the Lord of Heaven and Earth (three times)

God of wonders beyond our galaxy
You are holy, holy
Lord of heaven and earth
Lord of heaven and earth

The God of wonders beyond our galaxy (You)
You are holy, holy
Precious Lord, reveal Your heart to me
Father, holy, holy (lord God Almighty)

So early in the morning
I will celebrate the light
As I stumble in the darkness
I will call your name by night

The universe declares Your majesty (You are holy)
You are holy (yes you are) holy (Holy You are)
Holy (Jesus saves), holy

Hallelujah! To the Lord of Heaven and Earth (three times)

God of wonders beyond our galaxy
You are holy, holy
The universe declares your majesty
You are holy, holy

It's a song I listen to nearly every morning before I start my daily prayers and reading (the wonder of the iPhone). I will get to hear it live for the last time likely this March as Third Day winds down their performing career. I hope another group will continue their music and the Spirit-filled joy it brings to so many. Like other contemporary Christian songs, it has become a rhythm of my daily prayer life and routine.

"God of Wonders" is praise to God for His amazing creation. I wonder at it nearly every morning as the sun comes up wherever I might be—home, Folly Beach, or distant locations for work or play. The connection I feel with God as our Creator is captured in "God of Wonders" and renews me daily. When I don't see that sunrise or am trapped in a man-made environment for too long, that connection wanes despite my best efforts.

I am restored when I am back in that natural environment of God's creation and am always reminded that His amazing nature--oceans, mountains, forests, vast expanses--are more amazing and beautiful than any building or artifice people try to create. Music that celebrates God's creation lifts me up, restores me, and reminds me of the amazing beauty of what lies ahead in His Kingdom.

Holding Babies

By Cal Worthington

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Matthew 19:14)

A world without babies would be like a symphony without music.

I miss holding babies – my babies – children and grandchildren. I realized that today while watching an elegant older lady cradle her great-granddaughter for the first time. In a moment of epiphany, I realized that at age eighty-four, in all likelihood, I will never hold a baby again. Suddenly, I felt a great loss. I had never considered that one of the unanticipated consequences of being blessed with longevity is the likely loss of holding a baby.

Babies work wonders upon the lives of those around them, especially the lives of parents and grandparents. Babies have a unique aroma that is difficult to describe but which anyone who has held a baby will readily recall. To me it is the scent of innocence and the smell of no-tears shampoo. Babies have their own sounds, too, creating melodies of coos.

They say old people have a unique smell also, but I am unable to confirm that. If it is true, I hope it is a tranquil fragrance, such that a baby would find pleasing and secure. Might it also be unpleasant for Heaven's portals—a condition that would require some immediate attention given my age.

A baby held close with soft hair blowing lightly against a rugged cheek can melt the heart of a six-foot-six tattooed gorilla of a man and find tenderness when nothing else can. Don't ask me how, but a baby seems to glow when sleeping, cradled contentedly in your arms as though you were God.

Babies trust that you will never drop them, abandon them, or let them go hungry. They find delight and wellness in the silly "itchy-gitchee-goo" phrases that spontaneously spring to one's lips when holding a baby.

Yes, I never realized until today, just how much I have lost never to hold a baby again, neither children nor grandchildren. The prospect of great grandchildren stretches far into an elusive future.

All my life I have heard the term, "a wise old man," and I have wondered when I would become such. Maybe it began today when I reflected upon the countless moments of joy when cradling an innocent baby in my arms and feeling humbled with the knowledge that I was blessed with the task of being the "training wheels" for that little life.

My children and grandchildren are now on their own life trajectories. I hope I did my part to inspire faith in God and guidance for more success than failure. But if I had another chance, I would roll around the floor and wrestle a little longer, and answer "yes" to pleas for one more piggyback ride, and sing one more lullaby. Yes, I miss holding babies, and I know that I always will. Babies bring music into our lives.

Music, A Family Legacy

By Agnes Stone

Music has been a part of my family for a long time. It was passed down through my mother's side of the family. My mother kept the history of the family through old Bibles, gravestone rubbings, and newspaper clippings. She shared this history with her six children.

One of the stories that I remember seeing many times was of my great-grandfather Professor Theodore DeHon Ruddock. He was named for a friend of the family who was the second Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina. Professor Ruddock was a nationally known organist and composer, and he was active in a program teaching music to school children. When he retired at the age of ninety-four, he was the oldest church organist in Charleston.

My grandfather was in a paid choir that sang in both the Presbyterian and Episcopal churches. My grandmother, who was widowed early with two small children, gave piano lessons. My mother went to nursing homes and played the piano for the residents to sing old hymns. She also led the junior choir at my church. Music and church were both part of my early life. My brother Jim Stroman studied music at Furman and served as band director at Hanahan Middle School for thirty years where he developed the musical talent of many students.

It became a joke in the family of who got "The Talent." Some of us got nothing, but a few got so much. My five children had a little musical talent. They all played in the band. My girls have beautiful voices and have sung solos in church. My sister's oldest son had "The Talent"! Tommy Gill, at the age of three, would sit on the floor under the keyboard and, reaching overhead, would pick out tunes. After he learned to read and write, the neighborhood piano teacher Mrs. Miller gave him piano lessons. So began the lifelong career of Tommy Gill, renowned jazz musician. We do not know who will be next to receive "The Talent." Maybe it is gone from us forever.

I am reminded of the Parable of Talents that Jesus taught. These talents were pieces of money, not just gifts. To one servant he gave five, to another he gave two, and the third got one. When the master returned, he found the servant with five had gained five more, and the servant with two had two more. This pleased the master, and he told them, *Well done, good and faithful servants; you have been faithful with a few things. I will set you over much.* (Matthew 25:23) The master took the talent from the servant who still had only one and gave it to the one who had ten, saying, *For to everyone who has more will be given more.* (Matthew 25:29) So, if God has given you a talent, use it and share it to the Glory of God.

Mistaking Earth for Heaven

By Grier Gadsden Brown

But bright Cecelia rais'd the wonder higher:
When to her organ vocal breath was given
An angel heard, and straight appear'd
Mistaking Earth for Heaven.

From "A Song for St. Cecelia's Day" by John Dryden, written in 17th century England

Dryden wrote his poem to honor St. Cecelia, the patron saint of music, on the occasion of her festival day. The poem glorifies music itself as a creator of cosmic harmony at creation and throughout time and musical instruments as vehicles to stir in man a full range of emotions and inspiration, but the poet designates the organ as the ultimate instrument.

As a child, when our home church's grand pipe organ sounded, I made the same error the angel of the poem did: I felt I was transported to God's celestial seat. The instrument's powerful sound reverberated and vibrated throughout every space in the building. That organ's commanding voice penetrated body and soul and convinced me again and again that I was as close to God's mighty presence as I could be here on earth. Oh, how wrong I was.

I no longer need the magnificent to know God is near. Now I hear Him in the quiet: the owls' soft calls to their partners, the pfft of a hummingbird's wings over my head, children's voices drifting over from the next street. I see Him in the small: the perfection of camellia buds, the intricacy of a bird's nest, the whorls of hair on a grandchild's head. I feel Him in the soft: a four-year-old's hand in mine, a briny breeze off the harbor, the velvet of a labrador's ear. I smell and taste as I prepare food for others to enjoy and thank Him for the simple gifts of cooking: sautéing, simmering, stirring, chopping, combining ingredients into a simple, earnest kind of music that feeds and nurtures.

My organ days are past now, and our Saint James' organ days are on hold. But oh, what music we make! Piano and guitar and voices blend and create a new kind of glorious worship through hymns old and new. No gilding or gothic arches form our sanctuary, but it is a holy space manifested in simple lines and serene hues that allow the Holy Spirit's peace to permeate all of us. What a perfect symphony we people create in the passing of the peace, sermons, coffee hour, Bible studies, Fall Market, receptions, dinners, donations of cereal and coats, service to others within and without our congregation! How pleased God must be with our music: He wrote the score and the lyrics in his Scripture, and we are his instruments. Thanks be to the Lord!

Music Brings Power and Peace

By Gwen Corinth

A few years ago, our son Ben introduced us to contemporary Christian music. I must admit, I did not take to it right away. He kept his car radio tuned to a Christian station. Riding with him, I was always turning down the volume. Electric guitars and drums didn't mesh with my image of worship music. Who wants to listen to a guitar and drums in church? Give me the classical, melodious sound of an organ, perhaps accompanied by a violin or harp. And play the old hymns that I remember from my youth!

My favorite hymns include "When Morning Gilds the Skies," "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation," "Be Thou My Vision, O Lord of My Heart," and others, most of them written in the 19th century and earlier. I was open to some gospel music, like "Blessed Assurance," which I first heard actress Geraldine Page sing in *The Trip to Bountiful*, a wonderful 1985 movie in which Page annoys her daughter-in-law by constantly singing hymns around the house. And I loved "Morning Has Broken," when Cat Stevens sang it on his 1971 album *Teaser and the Firecat*. These songs are beautiful to me, although they vary greatly in style.

But contemporary Christian to me seemed decidedly not beautiful or uplifting. It was too loud and jarring, and the words too repetitive, almost dumbed down, in my opinion.

Then, I heard Chris Tomlin sing, "Whom Shall I Fear?" and it changed my mind about contemporary church music. The song begins as a call for help, then channels God's strength as He answers and lifts us up and banishes fear:

You hear me when I call
 You are my morning song
 Though darkness fills the night
 It cannot hide the light
 Whom shall I fear?
 Knowing that God is never far and answers my call is my comfort and strength:
 I know who goes before me
 I know who stands behind
 The God of angel armies is always by my side
 The One who reigns forever
 He is a friend of mine
 The God of angel armies is always by my side

I am moved to tears when I hear this song. To me it is the perfect answer in times of trouble. It was inspired by Psalm 27: *The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid? When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.*

David expressed how he felt God's strength fills him in times of trouble. Now I feel it, too.

And nothing formed against me shall stand
 You hold the whole world in Your hands
 I'm holding on to Your promises
 You are faithful
 You are faithful

Lauren Daigle's Contemporary Christian Music

By Pat Majors

Lauren Daigle has been among the many contemporary Christian artists who have had concerts in the Charleston area. However, I was drawn to her music long before my daughter, Nancy, took me to her concert in 2021. Daigle's music is influenced by the Cajun, blues, and zydeco music of her native Louisiana. As a composer-lyricist, she incorporates Scripture into her "conversations" with God. For example, in "Your Wings," excerpted below, she personalizes "Psalm 91."

When ten thousand arrows take flight remind me that You are my armor
There's always a place I can hide when I am desperate for shelter
You're my covering; I'm safe, I'm safe. Whatever comes at me, I'm safe, I'm safe
You've got me under Your wings; Under Your wings. . .
You cover me, You cover me. I'm under Your wings.

Daigle's song, "Trust in You," reminds me of my own struggles. . . times when my prayers seemed to go unanswered or worse, unheard. Then, as my faith matured, like Daigle, I came to accept that God's farsighted will for my life was infinitely better than my shortsighted one.

Letting go of every single dream, I lay each one down at Your feet
Every moment of my wandering never changes what You see
I've tried to win this war, I confess. My hands are weary, I need Your rest
My warrior, King of the fight, no matter what I face, You're by my side
When You don't move the mountains I'm needing You to move,
When You don't part the waters I wish I could walk through,
When You don't give the answers as I cry out to You,
I will trust, I will trust, I will trust in You
Truth is, You know what tomorrow brings. There's not a day ahead You have not seen.
So in all things, be my life and breath. I want what You want, Lord, and nothing less

Lastly, I can relate to "Hold on to Me" because I, too, ask God not to give up on me—His work in progress.

When the best of me is barely breathin', When I'm not somebody I believe in, Hold on to me
When I miss the light, the night has stolen, When I'm slammin' on all the doors You've opened,
Hold on to me, Hold on to me
Hold on to me when it's too dark to see You, When I am sure I have reached the end
Hold on to me when I forget I need You., When I let go, hold me again. . .
I could rest here in Your arms forever, 'Cause I know nobody loves me better
Hold on to me, Hold on to me

Lauren Daigle's songs above fall within the prayer category of contemporary Christian music. Other themes include worship, faith, praise, encouragement. . . and yes, adaptations of the psalms and traditional hymns. Thanks to streaming devices, there are many options.

Jump, Jump, Jump to the Glory of God

By Sue Morrison

Little children love to sing and dance and jump (and jump some more)! I am blessed to witness this every Thursday morning at children's chapel at Saint James Anglican's Day School. Twenty-five to forty children pile into the old library, sit on the floor, and get ready to praise the Lord. Father Richard Grimball started (or restarted) children's chapel, and I don't even remember when I first started going, but I was hooked.

Following Richard's lead, we (Sam—our Youth Leader —and I) start each Thursday morning with "Gospel Stretches" to the tune and actions of "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes," but we sing Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We bend and stretch, first slowly, then fast, then really fast, then slowly again. Once warmed up, we sing "Jesus Loves Me," complete with sign language, and even most of the two-year-olds can do it. They get so excited when they do the motions correctly. We have a regular repertoire of songs, and they will let us know if we forget one. Each Thursday there is a short lesson or story, usually with a corresponding song. "The Creation Song" and "God Made Everything" (to the tune of "Row, Row, Row Your Boat") reinforced the Creation unit, and "Put on the Full Armor of God" helped us learn the parts of God's armor. It is a true joy to see the children sing and dance and jump and have fun with the chapel songs, learning while singing. And every song is their "favorite"!

We end every chapel with a "song" by Richard Grimball. It is prefaced by saying, "All we do, we do to the glory of God. We jump, we clap, we spin, we pray, we do everything to show God's glory." Then we sing and jump and dance: "We're gonna jump, jump, jump; we're gonna jump, jump, jump; we're gonna jump, jump, jump all day (repeat)! We're gonna spin, spin, spin.... We're gonna mingo, mingo, mingo ("flamingo").... We're gonna clap, clap, clap... (and any other actions they come up with!) We're gonna nap, nap, nap..." Then we end with them exhausted on the floor, and "we're gonna pray, pray, pray, we're gonna pray, pray, pray all day." And we do; we pray and say the Lord's Prayer together.

Such fun, such joy, so many smiles, and such laughter, all while praising and learning God's story.

Children are a blessing and a gift from the Lord. (Psalm 127:3)

And Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven." (Matthew 18:2-5)

My Favorite Christmas Song

By Virginia Bartels

When you enter my home during the Christmas season, you will see decorations in every direction you look. Collections of Santas, snowmen, and angels are prominently displayed. The tree is covered by ornaments made by our children and grandchildren and given by former students and other loved ones. However, my favorite Christmas decorations are the manger scenes. One of them consists primarily of popsicle sticks that my son Joe made at our previous church campus of Saint James Episcopal. His little five-year-old hands carefully glued the scene together. The most elaborate manger scene consists of pewter figures that my husband Dick and I purchased during a trip to Ireland.

Just as our various manger scenes portray the Biblical verses about the birth of our Savior, so does my favorite Christmas song, "Mary, Did You Know?" Written by Mark Lowry in 1984, the lyrics consist of rhetorical questions that make the listener or singer contemplate the relationship between Mary and her baby son. It portrays the mystery of Incarnation as well as the Man He became.

According to the Book of Luke, Mary—a faithful teenage virgin—was "the highly favored" one chosen by God to give birth to His Son. After hearing this proclamation of the angel, Mary revealed her servant's heart in "Mary's Song." (Luke 1:46-55)

In this modern Christmas classic, the lyrics ask what Mary knew about her miracle baby. A mother holds and kisses her baby; when Mary kisses hers, she "kisses the face of God." Mothers ponder what their babies will become as adults. Did Mary know the details of her Son's future—that He would walk on water, calm storms with His hand, give sight to the blind, enable the deaf to hear, empower the lame to leap, give speech to those without voice, raise the dead, save and deliver humankind? He was indeed "the perfect Lamb," "the Lord of all creation," the "Great I AM!"

Did she also know about The Last Supper, Judas' betrayal, Peter's three denials, Pilate and Herod, the crucifixion? Did she know about the empty tomb, the resurrection, the ascension? Maybe we do not need to know what Mary knew as she held that baby boy. Maybe all we need to know about this mother-child relationship was that Mary trusted God with her son from His birth to His Death. His pierced hands and feet resulted in our forgiveness and salvation.

When I hear this song performed, I get chills. When I try to join the congregation in singing it, I get choked up. Tears sting my eyes. In fact, my family members now steal glances out of the sides of their eyes to see if I'm crying yet as we move from one stanza to the next. (How embarrassing!) They know how touched I am by the visuals and the questions. I am amazed that much of the Gospel focusing on our Savior is condensed in this short song!

The Trinity

By Lee Glover

Let all be silent,
Let the shining stars not shine,
Let the springs and rushing rivers be still.
As we sing hymns to Father and Son and Holy Spirit,
Let all the powers respond: Amen, Amen!
Power, praise, and glory to God,
The only giver of all good things. Amen. Amen.

The above hymn was found in 1918 by two British archaeologists who were working in Oxyrhynchus, Egypt. The partial piece of papyrus was discovered amid a large pile of "trash." The Oxyrhynchus hymn was written around 250 A.D. and is widely considered to be the oldest Christian hymn on record.

There were hymns prior to the Oxyrhynchus hymn, though it is impossible to know the very first music or hymn ever played. Over 3,400 years ago, around 1400 B.C., the Hurrian Hymn No. 6 was written on clay tablets in Syria. People also sang Psalms and chants of passages from the Hebrew Bible, yet the Oxyrhynchus hymn is notable for several reasons.

The hymn is significant because it maintained its original musical notations, thereby enabling modern reconstruction. Also, the notations facilitate a look into early Christian music, worship practices, and beliefs.

Additionally, it is the first known Christian hymn to specifically mention the Trinity -- the "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Prior to this hymn, most songs were a blend of pagan thoughts and Christian beliefs. Many pagans worshiped the sun or the moon or other elements of nature. This hymn reveals a unified belief in the superiority of the Trinity over nature.

Beginning with few in numbers, Christianity steadily spread. In 301 A.D. Armenia became the first nation in the world to identify as a Christian nation.

Life as a Christian during the early years after Christ's crucifixion was often perilous. While Christians worked, had families, and engaged in many ordinary activities, they were suspect if they did not worship Roman gods. Christians were often imprisoned, tortured, and even killed.

Through those stressful days of oppression and persecution, Christians persevered. They met in small groups, developed enduring relationships, and built community.

Remarkably, it was during those difficult days that the Oxyrhynchus hymn was written. The hymn embraced the Holy Trinity, which is the expression, example, and promise of love, life, and eternal salvation.

In 1826 Anglican bishop Reginald Heber wrote the hymn "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty." From his small town in England, Bishop Heber's song has become a classic hymn of the Trinity.

1,700 years after the Oxyrhynchus hymn was written, there are today over 2.8 billion Christians in the world. Yearly sales of the Bible in just the United Kingdom have increased more than 100% since 2019. The top selling Christian song in America in 2025, with sales of over two million units, was "Hard Fought Hallelujah" by Brandon Lake. Just over ten years ago, Brandon was a worship minister at Seacoast Church in Mt. Pleasant.

Struggles and hardships continue, but blessedly, the Trinity -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- reign eternal!

God's Messages of Comfort Received Through Music

By Maxine Swafford

God has spoken to me many times through the lyrics of hymns and songs. There were two times, once many years ago and once recently, that resonate with me.

The first time was at my daddy's funeral service in the 1990s. He had requested the hymn "Sweet Beulah Land" to be sung. As the hymn was being sung, I saw Daddy standing by a river in a peaceful setting. The second verse of the hymn says, "I am now looking across a river." Daddy was standing on a riverbank, looking across, as the lyrics said.

The original "Beulah Land" hymn was written in 1876 by Edgar Page Stiles, who was inspired by Isaiah 62:4 and *Pilgrim's Progress*, describing a spiritual borderland to heaven. "Sweet Beulah Land," the Southern gospel song written by Squire Parsons, drew on the original hymn.

"Beulah" in Hebrew means married and symbolizes God's restored relationship with His people, the nation of Israel, and a place of rest and promise before entering eternal glory. God's message to me during the funeral service was that my daddy had reached his heavenly home and was at rest.

The second time was January 12, 2025. My daughter, Pam, had died in December, and I was still grieving. That Sunday the Offertory was "Love Has Come." As the second verse was being sung, I felt that those words were being spoken directly to me.

To anybody who has ever lost a loved one
And you feel you had to let go too soon
I know it hurts you to say goodbye
But don't you know it is just a matter of time
'Til the tears are gonna end
You see 'em once again and in that moment

Oh and on that day
We will stand amazed at our Savior God and King
Just to see the face of amazing grace
As our hearts rise up and sing

Yes, it hurt to say goodbye so soon, but God's message to me is that I will see her again. His grace is amazing!

You Sing to My Soul

By Amy Knox

Some say that music offers a window into the soul; maybe this is true. The listener gets a glimpse through lyrics into the artist's deepest thoughts and feelings. For me, music is an ethereal cord that tethers my soul directly to the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Whether it's reverence, sadness, joy, or praise that I'm feeling, there is a song that will draw me close to the One my soul seeks.

"You Sing to My Soul"

In the quiet of the night when my soul seeks comfort
You whisper a lullaby that blankets me in Your softness and pulls me into sleep.

When I wander along the shore or climb the rocky trails of a mountain peak
You shout a mighty bold crescendo that mirrors the awe I feel in Your creation.

If sadness and despair have me in their grip
You wail a dirge so forlorn and gloomy even my sorrows pale in comparison.

On days when all is right and I feel light
You call up an airy symphony and the joy of Your presence bubbles through me

At moments when overwhelming gratitude fills my heart
You thunder an alleluia and my heart sings of Your praise.

If anger has me in its cold embrace
You invoke a soothing litany that calms my storm and reminds me of Your grace.

When my world crumbles and leaves me without faith
You proclaim a rousing chorus that reminds me You are near

No matter how I feel
Your words know just how to sing to my soul.

A Special Song

By Tina Thompson

Music is first mentioned in the Book of Genesis (4:21), where Jubal is described as the ancestor of all those who play the flute and harp. Psalm 150 calls for praising God with all instruments: *Let everything that has breath praise the Lord*. Music is also mentioned after The Last Supper when Jesus and His disciples celebrated in Matthew 26:30, which is regarded as an additional medium for praise and worship. Music appears in many stories throughout the Bible, and songs can help express gratitude to God for all the celebrations in life.

It was not too long ago when I received a phone call that my mom was having trouble breathing and was being rushed to the hospital. I began to sob in the car and headed to the hospital when a song—"You Have a Friend in Jesus"—came on the radio station—HIS Radio 100.1. I quickly stopped crying and began to smile because I knew my mom was going to be okay. God sent me a gentle reminder that everything was alright, just when I needed it most. I often recall that morning and how swiftly Jesus can transform something in our lives.

I remember hearing for the first time "Come, Jesus, Come" by Cece Winans—a song originally written by Stephen McWhirter and inspired by Revelations 22:17—and feeling a sense of peace as it reminded me of Jesus' promise to return, heal, and restore. It shows how important prayers are and how music makes it easy to sing to our Lord.

During Lent, you may notice that God sometimes provides us with a song to guide us through challenges in life—often by attending church services or even while watching online. I'm so thankful for our Saint James Church family and all the beautiful music our praise team provides every Sunday.

Praising God

By Terri Custer

Approximately two and a half years ago, while traveling with a group, we were in a church; I don't remember the name of it, 6300 miles from Charleston. The distinguishing feature of the church, as explained by the guide, was its acoustics. As an example of this, the guide wanted the group to pick a song and sing it; he gave no suggestions and put no limit on the kind or length of the song.

The group consisted of people from several different cities and church denominations; many of the group had not met each other before the trip, and none of them were performers or singers. After a pause of literally only about two seconds, one in the group suggested The Doxology. The group agreed immediately. The result was amazing. Without rehearsal, without accompaniment, without coordination, what evolved was one of the most beautiful and harmonious versions I've ever heard. The beauty was not because of the acoustics, which were anticipated, but because of the way God's music created a perfect moment from a very diverse group of people.

A Heavenly Moment of Peace

By Terri Custer

When I was a child, I heard a story that, at the time, I believed was just a wonderful story. As I grew up, I heard the story again from people who believed it was true. Over time, I have learned the story is true and historically accurate. Most people have probably heard the story before, but for anyone who hasn't, here it is in very brief form.

During World War I, on Christmas Eve, German soldiers were fighting Allied soldiers. There was a short break, and the German soldiers began singing "Silent Night." The Allied soldiers heard them and joined in. The result was a peaceful merging of the two major enemies complete with the singing of Christmas hymns and the exchange of gifts such as cigarettes and candy.

God used His music to provide one of His miracles, His peace, for those who really needed it. Every time I think about the story, it moves me deeply and is a perfect example of how God is always aware of our needs and continues to take care of us.

Music Memories Shared Abroad

By Joyce Wichmann

Growing up on my grandparents' farm, my parents were not church-goers. There was a small Presbyterian church which held services twice a month in the afternoon. At age seven or eight, I would go there with my grandmother, even though there were no other children and no separate classes for them. Furthering the starkness, there was no music, except for an a cappella rendition of "The Doxology." I sat through Sunday school with my grandmother and other elderly ladies. Other than a detailed description of Mrs. Jackson's hat, I came home with nothing to tell my parents and no enticements for them to go with us.

A couple of years later, my aunt in Belmont, worried about our eternal souls, finally convinced her brother (my dad) to bring his family to the First Baptist Church in Belmont. What a revelation--lots of children and classes by age groups meeting every Sunday and MUSIC! There was an organ, a choir, and the most rhythmic, singable hymns! We were hooked, and before long, we were all confirmed, baptized (yes, dunked), and involved. When the doors were open, we were there. Obviously, it was not just the music that attracted us, but it certainly played a part, and the hymns left lasting memories. I especially liked the lively ones with clearly defined tunes. Even today when our church sings one of the old hymns from *The Baptist Hymnal*, it becomes an "ear worm" that can last for days as I go about the house singing out loud.

Of course, no one has ownership of these hymns, and they are often sung in other denominational churches, but my first exposure to them remains there in the Baptist church.

A few years back on a trip to France with three church friends, we were in our rental car when the conversation led to the realization that three of us had Baptist backgrounds, and we started sharing memories of our experiences as Baptists. In no time we were belting out some of our favorite "Baptist" hymns: "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus," "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," "The Old Rugged Cross." "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." "Love Lifted Me," "Beneath the Cross of Jesus," "On Christ the Solid Rock I Stand," "I'll Fly Away," "Shall We Gather at the River," and so many more. Three Christian women in a faraway land raising their voices in songs of praise! Blessed be the tie that binds!

No Longer a Slave of Fear

By Chris Crosby

I've experienced fear for as long as I can remember. When I was six, I asked my dad how I could calm my fear as I walked at night around the lakes on St. James Drive in Riverland Terrace. He said, "Just whistle." As my life proceeded, I was exposed to other fears, including anxiety (directly) and depression (indirectly) – two of the most powerful and debilitating manifestations of fear. Of course, while "just whistle" covered me on my walks around the lake, it did not allay my more serious fears. I don't think I'm alone.

Some years ago on a church-sponsored retreat, our Praise Team Leader played a song titled "No Longer Slaves" written by Jonathon David Helser and sung by Jonathon and his wife Melissa. As an intro, our leader shared the "Back Story" to the song as well as his own connection to the bridge: "You split the sea, so I could walk right through it, my fears are drowned in perfect love, You rescued me so I could stand and say, I am a child of God." While he connected with the bridge, the chorus appealed directly to me: "I'm no longer a slave to fear, I am a child of God."

God allows seasons of sorrow and suffering – including those created by fear. Yet, as Apostle Paul stated in Romans 5: 3:5 (NIV): *Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.*

The joy that is mentioned is not the happy-happy kind of joy - it is the joy of knowing that God has us and will carry us through the valleys into eternity with Him. God doesn't intend for us to live in fear, only in fear of Him. It is not fear in the conventional sense – it's love and reverence for Him. If He will split the sea for us, what will He NOT do?

The Bible includes over 300 phrases where God encourages us to "fear not" or "do not fear" or "be not afraid." Since "you are a child of God," you should have no fear. Enjoy the following verses, recalling the bridge and the chorus. Hopefully, when you hear this song, you will, like I do, cry tears of joy.

You unravel me with a melody
You surround me with a song
Of deliverance from my enemies
'Til all my fears are gone

From my mother's womb
You have chosen me
Love has called my name
I've been born again to Your family
Your blood flows through my veins

I am surrounded by the arms of the Father
I am surrounded by songs of deliverance
We've been liberated from our bondage
We're the sons and the daughters
Let us sing our freedom

Songwriters: Brian Johnson / Joel Case / Jonathan David Helser & Melissa Helser

Melody Line

By Jane Read

Music has been an integral part of me and foundational in my faith. From an early age, music was part of our family's life. God imbedded music in me and has used it to speak to me and draw me to Him.

"God Is Working His Purpose Out" is one such example. When I hear it, I am transported to our family's living room as my sister played this hymn in her strong and assured style. She made our upright piano shake as she hammered the low booming octaves. Two phrases always called out to be remembered: "God is working His purpose out as year succeeds to year" and "for the earth shall be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea." These words give me powerful comfort. God's plan is His plan, He is working it out, and it will not be complete until the end of time – which is in His hands. That's simultaneously scary and comforting. As I grew into my faith, this hymn resonated as a deep reminder of who God says He is. The final phrase is from Habakkuk 2:14 *For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.* This verse is part of God's reply to Habakkuk's complaint that evil is winning and that God isn't doing anything about it. God reassures Habakkuk that He is indeed working - in His time verse 2:3 *For the revelation awaits an appointed time....* I didn't know when I first heard this hymn, and loved it for how my sister played it, that I would come to love it even more because of what it tells me about who God is.

"Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence" is an altogether different-sounding hymn. It's a mournful whisper concluding with loud Alleluias. In its minor key and mournful tone, it poignantly describes the majesty and power of Christ. The opening phrase comes from Habakkuk, 2:20: *The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth be silent before Him.* And the fourth verse references Isaiah 6:2-3 when he's in the smoke-filled temple and has a vision of the Lord seated on a throne, *Above Him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory."* Again, this message is oddly comforting because it sounds so mournful and dark I can almost feel the pain of Christ's suffering for us. And yet, He is on the throne – declared to be so hundreds of years before Jesus took on human form. God is indeed working His purpose out for the whole world, and He's working it out in me. And it will not be complete until He declares it to be so "when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God!"

Hymns 534 & 324, *The Hymnal 1982*

Make a Joyful Noise

By Osia Brummett

Sing praises to the Lord. (Psalm 42:6)

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. (Psalm 100:1)

The years of joy singing in the choir at Saint James brought many times of love, peace, and Holy Spirit-filled moments. The nights of practice were great times to get to know all of the choir members and for me to feel accepted, known, and blessed. The other choir members knew that I could not read music, but I never heard negative comments, only encouragement.

Mack Swafford asked me to join the choir. When he did, I asked him if the choir provided the bucket because I couldn't carry a tune. That moment began a great relationship with Mack. He said I was a base, so I sat next to him.

It was a great blessing to me to sing with all of the beautiful voices in our choir. When we performed at the Christmas and the Easter services, the choir was filled with voices of "angels." I could feel the Holy Spirit moving in all of us. Listening to Jane Read, Robert Dixon, and Dustin Chavis sing God's word would light up the whole church.

I have to admit--if not for sitting behind Robert and next to Dustin and Mack, I would not have sung so "loudly." Thanks be to God, I "made a joyful noise." God is still using the voices at Saint James for His glory. Thank you, choir, for your love of our Lord.

Morning Has Broken

By Peggy Wieters

During my early years, I was a big fan of Cat Stevens. It was then that I heard for the first time the song "Morning Has Broken." Ever since then, it has been very close to my heart, and that is a lot of years.

Hearing of God's creation in this way, I feel a surge of gladness in my spirit. When I hear these lyrics "like the first dewfall on the first grass/praise for the sweetness of the wet garden/sprung in completeness where His feet pass," I imagine God's delight. I picture Him smiling, laughing, and having such fun in it. I must say it surpasses awesomeness!

One Foundation

By John Mikell

Many old hymns and contemporary songs sung during church services through the years pop into our heads (at least mine) as we go about business in our daily lives. They all remind me that Christ walks with me every day and night. One hymn "The Church's One Foundation" occurs to me more frequently and consistently than any other. When you are particularly frustrated, play your favorite hymn or contemporary song in your mind to remind you that Jesus loves you and accompanies you continuously. Then, through a brief word or two, give thanks that He chose you first, and you choose Him, too.

Verse 1

The Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord
She is His new creation
By water and the Word
From heav'n He came and sought her
To be His holy bride
With His own blood He bought her
And for her life He died

Verse 2

Elect from every nation
Yet one o'er all the earth
Her charter of salvation
One Lord one faith one birth
One holy name she blesses
Partakes one holy food
And to one hope she presses
With every grace endued

Verse 3

Though with a scornful wonder
Men see her sore oppressed
By schisms rent asunder
By heresies distressed
Yet saints their watch are keeping
Their cry goes up how long
And soon the night of weeping
Shall be the morn of song

Verse 4

'Mid toil and tribulation
And tumult of her war
She waits the consummation
Of peace forevermore
Till with the vision glorious
Her longing eyes are blest
And the great Church victorious
Shall be the Church at rest

Verse 5

Yet she on earth hath union
With God the Three in One
And mystic sweet communion
With those whose rest is won
O happy ones and holy
Lord give us grace that we
Like them the meek and lowly
On high may dwell with Thee

Hymn 525, *The Hymnal* 1982

In Christ Alone

Song of the Daughters of the Holy Cross

“In Christ Alone” captures the sense the Formation Committee of the Daughters of the Holy Cross had that Jesus Himself brought the Order into being. His Cross and Victory give the Order its meaning. The words of this song are powerful as they convey the many ways Christ showed—and continues to show—His love for us.

In Christ alone my hope is found;
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This Cornerstone, this solid ground;
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace;
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My comforter, my all in all
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone, Who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless Babe!
This gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones He came to save.
“Til on that cross that Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied;
For ev’ry sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain;
Then bursting forth in glorious day,
Up from the grave He rose again!
And as He stands in victory,
Sin’s curse has lost its grip on me;
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death
This is the pow’r of Christ in me;
From life’s first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my final destiny.
No pow’r of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand;
‘Til He returns or calls me home
Here in the pow’r of Christ I’ll stand.

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Seasons of Music

By Amy Knox

For as long as I can remember, music has been a part of my walk with Jesus. As a child, Sunday mornings meant church with my grandmother, and church meant music. The hymns sung in the big beautiful white church set the tone for the worship that followed. Sunday school and Friday night youth groups helped drive those lessons home. Life was pretty unsettled in those days. My mother was single and young, but the roots that were planted by music in those early days at Saint James would serve me well as I navigated from childhood to adolescence.

I often say I don't have a story of faith because faith, church, and music were just always there. But if there was a defining moment, it would have had to have happened at Camp Saint Christopher. I attended for so many years that they all blend together, but the feeling is one I'll never forget. I remember the campfires, sing alongs, and chapels where we all joined hands and sang camp songs into the night. So many of those precious songs guided me and calmed me when life was just too much. Songs like "Shut De Do'," "I've Got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy Down in My Heart," "Give Me Oil in My Lamp," and "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands" were beacons in the night as I struggled through my teenage years.

As I grew into myself and began to focus on growing the faith of my own children, music once again took on new meaning. Music was a way to teach my children about our faith in a fun and easy-to-understand way. We sang along to WOWkids Christian music tapes in the car on the way to school. Children's choir practice on Wednesday nights with Pat Gould meant Taco Bell for dinner and happy kids. Songs like "This Little Light of Mine," "I'm in the Lord's Army," and "Jesus Loves Me" were among our favorites. Nothing made me more proud (or exhausted) than those Sunday mornings when the girls pulled their red choir robes on and sang in front of the church.

These days the house is much quieter, but music still helps me navigate my way through life. Over the past few years, through Covid and the loss of my childhood church, music was a lifeline. The deep sadness I fell into had me clinging to songs of hope. "Shelter" by Carrollton, "I Will Fear No More" by The Afters, and "Eye of the Storm" by Ryan Stevenson gave me comfort that God was still there and would see me through. More recently, I feel as if I've finally clawed my way back into the light, and songs of praise and worship are on my heart again. "Great Are You, Lord" by Casting Crowns, "Lord, I Lift Your Name on High" by Hillsong, and "How He Loves Me" by David Crowder are songs that express my deep love and praise for a God that sees me and loves me.

Whether it's the innocent child, troubled youth, tired but happy momma, empty(ish) nester, or whatever version of myself that I grow into next, I know that my love of music and God will be with me always. I am so grateful that God gave me a lifelong love of music to guide and comfort me, no matter what seasons or trials I face.

Music for the Seasons of Life

By The Rev. Drew Miller

From the beginning of my walk with the Lord, music has held an essential place. It still does. In each season, different forms and styles meet me in different ways—but music itself has never been far from the heart of my faith.

I was raised on the '82 hymnal and knew many of the hymns as a child. "Come Thou Fount," "The Doxology" (Old Hundredth), and "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" (and a few others) sank in early and never really left. Their words are grounding. A professor in seminary told me that "a good friend knows your song and sings it back to you when you forget"—and I think in that sense these hymns remain dear friends of mine.

In high school and into college the contemporary worship scene helped my faith become more interwoven with my whole person than it was before. Fresh instrumentation and modern melody structures loosed more of my emotions into prayer and worship, interweaving my faith with even more parts of my being. It quickened my desire for Christ Himself, to know Him and to make Him known. And it introduced me to contemplation, to the art of sitting with God, perhaps attentive to some aspect or another of His character or maybe simply acknowledging that He is sitting with me. I led worship for several years in and after college, and it was this kind of music that meant the most to me then.

And then at the end of college, in the throes of despair and doubt, it was hymnology again that anchored me. I had been a part of RUF, a Presbyterian campus ministry at Furman, and their use of the reformation-era hymns (often with folk instrumentation) became a source of hope for years, especially in moments of particular darkness.

Now, as a pastor, music is a resource not only for my personal faith but also for the body of Christ. Music shapes and forms us, teaching the knowledge of God and freeing us into expressions and longings that we might not have even recognized in ourselves. It gives space to be still before God, alone before His love. But it also gives a medium in which our faiths can grow together. Corporate worship frees us from a secretly self-centered, self-referential faith, into the faith of God's family. How many of us, in seasons of hardship when faith has been hard to hold, have found the faith of God's people holding us up in the many voices singing around us? It's a profound gift. Much like reciting the creed, singing our praise together affirms and strengthens our feeble faiths.

In every season, worship music has been a gift of grace. Tolkien and Lewis both retold creation as an act of song, God singing all of the cosmos into existence. They were on to something. Even as we sing together, in every season, we find our hearts resonating with the heart of creation, which is ever singing back His praise.

I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light

By Louise Weld

We don't hear much about Jesus and music in the Bible, other than that the angels sang to the shepherds when Jesus was born. None of the apostles were musicians. But throughout Scripture, almost as much as "Fear not," we are commanded to "Sing to the Lord." Paul instructs the early believers *to be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart.* (Ephesians 5:19).

From Moses and his sister Miriam, to David and his Psalms, to the early believers, to Bach, Handel, to southern Gospel, to the grand old traditional hymns, to contemporary praise music: God has made music a way for us to praise Him. He also gives us music to soften our hearts, to convict and comfort us. We are created with musical genes, and so music is a way God mines an entrance into our hardened hearts to make His presence known to us.

As I set out on this next season of my life, "retirement," the world seems as dark as I have ever known it. And yet, there is One whom the darkness cannot overcome. He calls Himself the light of the world. He has made Himself known to us: His name is Jesus.

And so, as the journey through the darkness of Lent ends with the explosion of light and sound and earth shattering, which is the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead, we join the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven as we sing of Him Who has saved us and made us His own. His love for us has sealed it to our hearts, that no matter what, in Him there is no darkness at all.

I want to walk as a child of the light;
I want to follow Jesus.
God set the stars to give light to the world;
The star of my life is Jesus,

In Him there is no darkness at all;
The night and the day are both alike.
The Lamb is the light of the city of God;
Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.

I want to see the brightness of God;
I want to look at Jesus.
Clear Sun of righteousness, shine on my path,
And show me the way to the Father.

In Him there is no darkness at all;
The night and the day are both alike.
The Lamb is the light of the city of God;
Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.

Hymn 490, *The Hymnal* 1982

Easter Sunday, April 5, 2026

Jesus Christ is ris'n today, Alleluia!
our triumphant holy day, Alleluia!
who did once, upon the cross, Alleluia!
suffer to redeem our loss, Alleluia!

Hymns of praise then let us sing, Alleluia!
unto Christ, our heav'nly King, Alleluia!
who endured the cross and grave, Alleluia!
sinners to redeem and save, Alleluia!

But the pains which He endured, Alleluia!
our salvation have procured; Alleluia!
now above the sky He's King, Alleluia!
where the angels ever sing: Alleluia!

Sing we to our God above, Alleluia!
praise eternal as his love, Alleluia!
praise him, all y heavenly host, Alleluia!
Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Alleluia!

Hymn 207, *The Hymnal* 1982



