



SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

CULTURAL RESOURCES

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I. Introduction

As I indicated in the cultural resource material for the first Sunday of Advent, Advent is the first part of a larger liturgical season that includes Christmas and Epiphany and continues until the beginning of Lent. Traditionally, the four Sundays prior to Christmas and the Sunday closest to November 30th mark the beginning of the season of Advent (from the Latin *adventus*, meaning “coming”) as well as the church year of most Western Christian churches (Eastern Christian churches use September 1st as the beginning). Initially, Advent was a forty day period of penitence, fasting and confession intended as spiritual preparation for the “coming” of the “Nativity of Jesus Christ.”

Advent is the time when the church patiently prepares for the coming of Jesus Christ, but this is an active not a passive waiting. All who expect the Lord to return at any season want to be found doing his work when he returns.

II. A Soulful Celebration

In 1992, Warner Records issued the Quincy Jones, Mervyn Warren, Michael O. Jackson and Mark Kibble CD, A Soulful Celebration: Händel's "Messiah." The music is a fusion of Händel's melodies and selected biblical lyrics set against African American rhythm and blues, jazz and gospel idioms. Many black church choirs that did not sing "Messiah" in its original setting did not hesitate to perform, before the Advent season, this new incarnation of the work.

By no means was Soulful Celebration the first attempt at a fusion of Händel's "Messiah" and African American musical idioms. In the mid 1980s, European American conductor Marian Alsop invited local New York gospel choirs and black gospel singers to join her in a similar annual Advent performance. However, it was the lending of the name Quincy Jones combined with the extraordinary arrangements and stellar roster of performers (Dianne Reeves, Patti Austin, Stevie Wonder, George Duke, Take 6, Al Jarreau, Vanessa Bell Armstrong, Tramaine Hawkins, Howard Hewitt, and the Richard Smallwood Singers) that aided the mass appeal of Soulful Celebration.

Of course, there were many traditionalists who objected vehemently to the Soulful Celebration. Some went so far as to label it "desecration" and "sacrilegious." Since the primary purpose of music in a liturgical worship service is to reinforce the appointed scriptures, "But who may abide the day of his coming" and "And he shall purify" from "Messiah" or Soulful Celebration, irrespective of style, are most appropriate for the Second Sunday of Advent on the African American Online Lectionary. The lyrics are taken from Malachi 3:2-3.

Messiah/A Soulful Celebration: Händel's "Messiah"

-- But who may abide the day of his coming?

But who may abide the day of his coming and who shall stand when he appeareth?
For he is like a refiner's fire.

Messiah/A Soulful Celebration: Händel's "Messiah"

- And he shall purify

And He shall purify the sons of Levi,
that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

III. More Advent Music

It is from the idea of purification of the spirit in the manner that a precious metal is purified, that the following three songs are relevant for the second Sunday of Advent.

Give Me a Clean Heart

Give me a clean heart
To see you like I should, hey
To walk the path that's right
To do the thing you would

Give me a clean heart and I will serve nobody, but you

Give me a clean heart
To lose the double mind
To believe you when you tell me
Everything will be just fine
Just lay your hands on me Lord
And I will be brand new

And I am calling out to you for a strength exchange
I will gladly take your joy for my weakness
Give me a clean heart and I will serve nobody, but you
(Give me a clean heart and I will serve nobody but you)

Give me a clean heart
A better one I pray
To stay on the path you've chosen
And stick with it all the way
Give me a clean heart and I will serve nobody, but you

Give me a clean heart
I'm coming now to you
To keep my heart from fainting
This is all I know to do
Just lay your hands on me Lord
And I will be brand new

And I am worshiping your great and holy name
I'm determined to have life with no chains
Give me a clean heart and I will serve nobody but you
Give me a clean heart and I will serve nobody but you.¹

Give Me a Clean Heart

Give me a clean heart so I may serve thee.
Lord, fix my heart so that I may be used by thee,
For I'm not worthy of all your blessings.
Give me a clean heart, and I'll follow thee.

I'm not asking for the riches of this land,
And I'm not asking for men in high places to know my name.
Please-- give me, Lord, a clean heart that I may follow thee.
Give me a clean heart, and I'll follow thee.

Sometimes I'm up and sometimes I'm down.
Sometimes I'm almost level to the ground.
Please—give me, Lord, a clean heart that I may follow thee

Give me a clean heart, and I'll follow thee.²

Search Me, Lord

REFRAIN

Search me Lord, search me Lord;
Turn a light from heaven on my soul.
If you find anything that shouldn't be,
Take it out and straighten me.
I want to be right, I want to saved, I want to be whole.

STANZA 1

You know when I'm right, you know when I'm wrong.
You know where I go, and you know where I belong.
You know all that I do, you know all my secrets too.
Lord search me, touch me, clean me through and through.
(REFRAIN)

STANZA 2

You know all my thoughts; my every word and deed.
Lord you know my want, and you know my every need.
There may be something there, of which I'm not aware.
Lord take it, move it, keep me in your care.
(REFRAIN)

STANZA 3

Lord I try to pray, and serve you every day.
Keep me ever meek, and humble on the way.
If this don't suffice, and satisfy the Christ,
Lord tell me, show me, help me to be right.
(REFRAIN)³

IV. Teaching Our Children And Youth about Advent

The messages of Advent are not always effectively translated for the children and youth of the Church. The Advent ritual, including its associated music, is often skewed towards the experience and knowledge of the older members of the congregation and set forth in ways that are primarily appreciated by middle-aged and older adults. While the children and youth may be included in the general Advent worship services, little time is given and little effort is expended towards effectively teaching them the origins and purposes of Advent. We need to ensure that the Advent music, offerings and presentations are inclusive enough to cater to the needs, interests or concerns of the Church's children and youth.

In some churches, the Advent season is the time the church's children and youth start practicing for their Christmas pageant, learning their Christmas speeches, rehearsing their Christmas dances and preparing their Christmas musical presentations. All of this takes the focus off of Advent and places it on Christmas. In fact, compared to Advent, the Church does an excellent job of

preparing its children and youth for Christmas. It is much more inclusive, age-wise, in the manner in which it celebrates and teaches children and youth about the actual birth of Christ -- the Christmas story. If called upon, practically every child, regardless of age, could speak coherently and meaningfully about the baby Jesus story. If pressed, many of those same children also would be able to distinguish the importance of the birth of Jesus from their Christmas wish list.

Why is this so? It is so because the Church has worked consistently hard to teach the baby Jesus story to its children and youth. It has carefully developed, promoted and institutionalized a body of age sensitive music that translates the baby Jesus story to the young. It has been creative in its use of "story time," Christmas plays, Sunday School, multimedia options, books, and child centered sermons to impart the Christmas Story. And, it has actively and consciously included children and youth of all ages in the Church's worship services that focus on the birth of Jesus.

In the main, at most African American churches, no such institutional approach exists for the teaching of our children and youth about the origins and purposes of Advent. It is hard to find child-centered advent programs in the black Church. Thus, is it any wonder that congregations, including pastors, worship leaders and ministers of music, tend to rush past Advent to the bright lights of Christmas? No! Maybe it is not turning away from the lights or the gifts of Christmas that will increase our focus on Advent, it just might be the inclusion of children that we need to slow us down.

With focused attention, the Church, using the experience it has with imparting the Christmas story, can teach the Advent story to its children and youth. The institutional infrastructure already exists. Only the institutional will is lacking. To achieve this goal, the Church must reorder its traditional approaches to Advent.

First, the church can employ a sustained approach to ensure all Advent programs are inclusive, age sensitive, and child and youth-centered. Second, it can develop, promote, and institutionalize activities, classes, and programs that address and cater to the actual interests, needs, and respective learning levels of the Church's children and youth. And, third, the Church must be willing to include computers, electronic games, movies, videos, dance, poetry, rap music, and other creative tools in its Advent celebration, teaching and training models.

If the Church uses art forms and learning platforms most comfortable and familiar to its children and youth, it will be able to engage them and help them embrace the full meaning of Advent. Then they will hide the Advent message in their hearts. And, when the time is right, they will impart the Advent message to their children. They will do as they have done with the Christmas Story -- fully embrace it.

A good way to begin teaching children and youth about Advent is through the advent candles, more information about which is found in the cultural resource unit for the Third Sunday of Advent. Also, the following children's songs could be a helpful start for any congregation wanting to develop a child and youth-centered Second Sunday Advent program. To be even more effective, creative music leaders can work with children and youth to turn these standards into gospel hip-hop songs:

- “Jesus Wants Me For A Sunbeam.” African American Heritage Hymnal. Chicago IL: GIA Publications, 2001. #614
- “We're Growing.” African American Heritage Hymnal. Chicago IL: GIA Publications, 2001. #618

Notes

1. Hammond, Fred. “Give Me a Clean Heart.” Purpose by Design. Southfield, MI: Verity/Face to Face Productions, 2000.
2. Douroux, Margaret. “Give Me a Clean Heart.” African American Heritage Hymnal. Chicago IL: GIA Publications, 2001. #461
3. Dorsey, Thomas A. and Various Artists. “Search Me Lord.” Precious Lord: New Recordings of the Great Gospel Songs of Thomas A. Dorsey. New York, NY: Columbia, 1973.