

Music Notes for January 21, 2024

Today is the third Sunday after Epiphany.

The service music during the Epiphany season includes the Presentation Hymn, each week a different stanza of the hymn “Christ, be our light” (listen [here](#)), the Sanctus by Joel Martinson (listen [here](#)), and the Fraction Anthem (my composition, listen [here](#)).

The Psalms during Epiphany will be sung using the Hymntune Psalter. Each week the Psalm Antiphon is set to a tune of a different familiar hymn and the choir sings the verses from the St. Helena Psalter to a coordinating psalm tone. The Antiphon for the third Sunday after Epiphany is set to the tune “Eventide,” which appears as hymn 662 in the Hymnal 1982, set to the text, “Abide with me, fast falls the eventide.” This tune/text combination is appropriate for the Psalm Antiphon, “For God alone my soul in silence waits.”

The opening hymn is the old favorite, “O God, our help in ages past.” This hymn by Isaac Watts (1674-1748) is a paraphrase of Psalm 90 and is considered to be one of the finest texts ever written. Although Psalm 90 is not appointed for today, the theme of assurance, hope, and promise in God marries well with today’s lessons from Jonah, I Corinthians, and Psalm 62. The prelude is based on the tune, “St. Anne,” composed by William Croft around 1710 as a setting for Psalm 42. However, the tune was set to Watts’ text in 1861 and the two have been paired together ever since. The set of variations by Paul Manz (1919-2009), written in the mid-1970s, still seems fresh today. Each variation represents the text of a particular stanza of the hymn – see if you can match them up while listening!

The Gospel lesson today is another recounting of the call by Jesus of his first disciples, this time as told by Mark (last week’s account was from Matthew). As a reflection on this Gospel passage, our sequence hymn is “Lord, when you came to the seashore,” written by the Roman Catholic priest, Cesáreo Gabarain, as part of the liturgical renewal in the years following Vatican II. While this hymn is probably unfamiliar to most, it is a very easy, tuneful Spanish-style ballad consisting of a short verse and refrain. The theme of the hymn is our reflections on having been called as followers of Jesus and how we will respond. We’re also singing this hymn today as part of our continuing effort to include music from a wide variety of sources. You can listen to a preview of the hymn [here](#).

Today’s anthem is “Eternal God,” by Richard Shephard. St. A’s choir sang this last November, but it is one of our favorites, so we are repeating it today. It’s a stirring composition with lots of beautiful close harmonies in both the choir parts and organ accompaniment. The text is suitable for many times in the church year, and it is based on one of the prayers of St. Augustine of Hippo, our patron.

The communion hymn, “Jesus Christ is waiting,” was written by John Bell for the Iona Community in Scotland. This hymn also reflects on our calling as followers of Jesus. It’s sung to the French Christmas carol, “Noel Nouvelet,” most frequently sung in Eastertide with the text,

“Now the green blade rises.” The closing hymn, “Forth in your name, O Lord, I go,” continues the theme of actions that we are called to undertake in response to the call of Jesus.

Finally, the postlude is called simply, “Fanfare for Organ.” Published in 1973, this composition, too, still sounds fresh to our ears today. The composer, Ronald Arnatt, was born and educated in England, and then emigrated to the U.S. after his university studies. He held positions at Trinity Church in Copley Square in Boston, Westminster Choir College in Princeton, and Christ Church Cathedral in St. Louis. He was known internationally for his choral, organ, and brass compositions, and was a past President of the American Guild of Organists. Dr. Arnatt passed away in 2018.