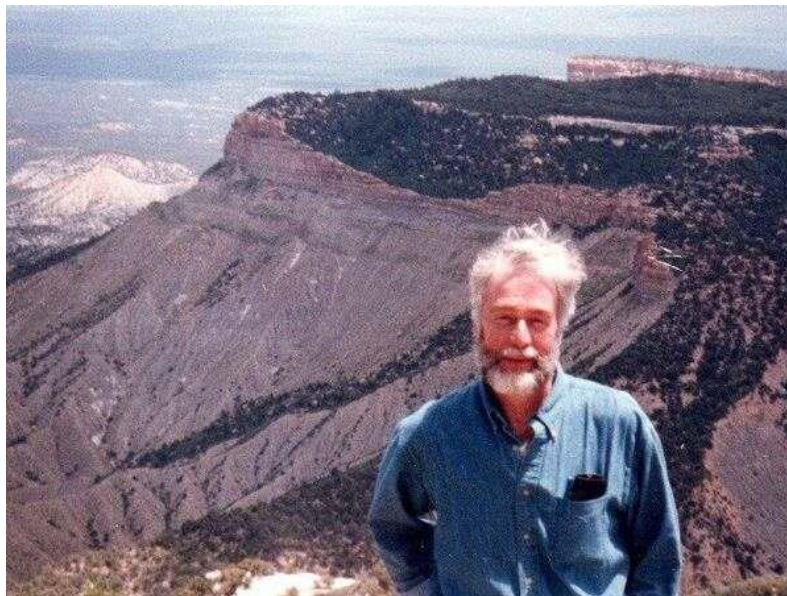




# Celebrate Home

## A Season of Many Hearts

by Todd Clark



Christmas time. The end of Summer and Fall. Winter. Advent is upon us. What a gift!

*"It came upon the midnight clear,  
That glorious song of old,  
From angels bending near the earth  
To touch their harps of gold;  
"Peace on the earth, good will to men  
From heaven's all-gracious King" –  
The world in solemn stillness lay*

*To hear the angels sing.”*

It is indeed a season of heart-warming and meaningful traditions and oft-repeated stories; a time of family and community gatherings and also perhaps, deeply reflective “alone-time”... prayer time, soul searching moments that can be deeply moving and also emotional—not necessarily only sad and difficult times, because there can be moments of grieving and loneliness—but, also perhaps... hopefully... tear-filled times of realizing deep joy and full contentment- of being at peace, of knowing your blessings.

It is, after all, at its heart—a season of rejuvenation and preparation, a time of anticipation- of good things to come, if we allow for that- and prepare for that- if we make room for that kind of new growth and becoming anew. This is a time when we we make ready to celebrate a holy birth that brings with it a wonderful, precious blessing...a life-changing, hopeful promise.

In the four-season parts of the world, nature is in the midst of its deeply organic, dependable transformation—the air gets cold, leaves have fallen, vines have withered and outdoor plants are either brought in or left outside to die—some of which will return again in a few months. And there is, once again, the challenge and opportunity to find comfort and meaning with the temporary loss of all that beautiful outdoor green life, the hallmarks of spring and summer: daily new blossoms and brightly colored flowers, vegetables that may have been grown and eaten, days and nights of warm breezes, long afternoons of hot, sun-baked outdoor fun—all of that has now receded and winter is moving upon us. Advent time. A time, my Dad once preached of “settling in”. Of being at peace and finding rest...finally...where we work hard to find or create those moments when the meaningless but ever-present commercial distractions have abated and the focus on what’s really important is clear. Midnight clear.

I remember when I was growing up in New England. We would gather together outside the small church in Dover, after the Christmas eve service, holding small, just-lit candles, to sing the final hymn. (The slowly dripping wax somehow always managed to land on my thumb!) Standing with everyone, we huddled closer together, listening to my Dad’s final Christmas message and then we sang the very words

that spectacularly captured where we were right at that beautiful moment: outside, in the clear, cold, midnight air.

*“It came upon the midnight clear,  
That glorious song of old...”*

What a great memory. Everything seemed to come together in such a peaceful, exciting, anticipatory, and powerful way. There was surety in that moment. Because of my father, the church had gathered like that for many years. In my young mind- that outdoor gathering time where we sang together, in the late-night, cold air---often under a clear, star-filled sky, was going to keep happening, forever. But it didn't. People moved on. I moved away. And yet, in my memory, and by telling that story, it still happens. I can still see us gathering and hear us singing. I can still feel the cold and know the excitement and peacefulness of that moment. My father has since passed away. There is a new congregation with their own traditions. And I am sure many that gathered those many years ago have also passed or moved on. And yet there is surety in that memory and moment- in the singing of that hymn. Surety in the promise of that birth... In the coming of Spring. In the promise of new life.

That is what is clear to me now. Midnight clear...that there is hope in a time of changing seasons. In the promise of new life beneath the frozen ground. There is hope in the miracle of a blessed birth beneath a brilliantly shining star, in a lowly stable, as the story goes. There is surety in this waiting time--for the arrival of good things – of joy and peace and forgiveness. I pray that you find times to reflect on that miracle birth and make room for its blessing. And that you bring good things to those in need. We are all in need of good things! We can each be peacemakers and also know the need to be at peace and find rest and forgiveness. We can all comfort and listen...share love and caring. We can bring joy... in the simplest of ways. What a wonderful season to give those kinds of gifts!

*“And ye, beneath life's crushing load,  
Whose forms are bending low,  
Who toil along the climbing way  
With painful steps and slow,  
Look now! for glad and golden hours*

*Come swiftly on the wing; –  
Oh, rest beside the weary road  
And hear the angels sing!”*

Amen.

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Advent Scripture Reference Lectionary  
[Luke 1:46-55](#); [Isaiah 33:17-22](#); [Revelation 22:6-7, 18-20](#)

Advent Hymn Reflection  
[“It Came Upon A Midnight Clear,”](#) performed by Josh Groban



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