

Notes from the Music Director (No. 20)

Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Rochester, Pennsylvania

Henry Doktorski, III

November 29, 2015—1st Sunday of Advent

Advent is a special time of the liturgical year: a time of expectant waiting and preparation for the coming of the infant Jesus at the Feast of the Nativity—Christmas. The Latin word *adventus* means “coming.” Devotional practices associated with Advent include keeping an Advent calendar, lighting an Advent wreath (which we do every Sunday during Advent at Grace Lutheran), praying an Advent daily devotional, as well as other ways of preparing for Christmas, such as singing Christmas carols and setting up Christmas lights and other decorations. (The service of the “Hanging of the Greens” during which the church’s Christmas tree is decorated will be celebrated at Grace Lutheran at 7 pm tonight.)

Oh yes, I forgot one other important tradition associated with Advent: Christmas shopping! (Just kidding. I know of no scriptural reference to the practice of exchanging gifts at Christmas, with the exception of the three magi, but they didn’t exchange gifts with each other, they presented gifts to the Christ child.)



Jacques Berthier

On a more serious note, our Communion hymn for the first Sunday of Advent is “Wait For the Lord” by Jacques Berthier (1923–1994), a French composer of liturgical music best known for writing much of the music used at Taizé. Berthier was born in Auxerre, Burgundy; both of his parents were musicians—his father was the kapellmeister and organist at the Auxerre Cathedral. Berthier studied music at the César Franck School in Paris.

In 1955 (and again in 1975) Berthier was asked to compose music for the Taizé Community, which was (in 1955) just a small monastic community of twenty brothers. Six years later Berthier became organist at the Church of the Jesuits in Paris, Saint-Ignace, where he worked until his death. Over several decades, Berthier built up an important corpus of church music that today can be heard around the world. He composed 232 songs in wide use today. He is also the author of Masses for organ, a cantata in the form of the cross and a cantata for Saint Cecilia.

Before his death, he humbly requested that none of his music be used during his funeral at Saint Sulpice (where I attended Mass during a visit to Paris in August 2014 and heard the magnificent 1862 Cavillé-Coll five-manual and pedal organ played by the titular organist David Roth).

The Taizé Community, an ecumenical monastic order founded in 1940 by Brother Roger Schütz (a Reformed Protestant) in Taizé, Saône-et-Loire, Burgundy, France, is regarded as one of the world's most important sites of Christian pilgrimage. Today, Taizé is composed of more than one hundred brothers, from Catholic and Protestant traditions, who originate from about thirty countries across the world.

Over 100,000 young people from around the world make pilgrimages to Taizé each year for prayer, Bible study, sharing, and communal work. The music of Taizé is minimalistic, meditative, and repetitive. It emphasizes simple phrases, usually lines from Psalms or other pieces of Scripture, repeated and sometimes also sung in canon. Much of the music was conceived and composed by Jacques Berthier.

To hear "Wait For the Lord" by Jacques Berthier, go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w5VxXp3CKww>.

Resources

Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version (Zonderfan: 1989)

LBW: Lutheran Book of Worship (Augsburg Publishing House: 1978)

WOV: With One Voice (Augsburg Fortress: 1995)

W&P: Worship & Praise Songbook (Augsburg Fortress: 1999)

ELW: Evangelical Lutheran Worship (Augsburg Fortress: 2006)

Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org>

Hymnary.org: <http://www.hymnary.org>

GIA Publications: <http://www.giamusic.com>

Hymntime.com: <http://hymntime.com>

Singers.com: <http://singers.com>

Back to the index of "24 Essays on 24 Hymns":
http://henrydoktorski.com/Music_Director_Notes.html.