



# SEEDS

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## In Grateful Expectancy

by Patricia Thomas

This is the wondrous time of year when we stand in the space between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Our hearts are filled with strong emotions of both thankfulness and expectation. If we stand in the aisles of Wal-Mart or Target we may be trapped in the whirlwind of the frantic accumulation of things secular: cornucopias for the Thanksgiving table, orange and green striped gourds, and dark brown paper plates with matching napkins artfully strewn with yellow and crimson leaves. Moving over an aisle or two we step into the reds and deep forest greens of Christmas: tiny ice skaters on a glass pond and molded figurines carrying packages home to their music box houses perched on top of a white cotton-covered hill side; velveteen bows and smiling Santa stickers for packages and windows add a festive, playful touch to this our season of thanksgiving and eager anticipation. The Salvation Army bells ringing in the lobby are as much a part of the season as turkey and stuffing. The sounds and sights of the holidays are inescapable.



Photo courtesy of Jennifer Roth.

I do not want to ignore the reality that this Thanksgiving-Advent time of year is a tough one emotionally for many of us. But for me, at its very best, this truly is the “most wonderful time of the year!” The mixture of secular and sacred serves to remind me of the life-giving power that *gratitude* gives and the faith-sustaining importance of *expectation*.

As the farmers around us gather in the corn and soy beans, the year’s eagerly awaited harvest, my grumbling about the dust and corn husk litter blowing across the yard gives way to gratitude as the heavy grain trucks, full to the brim with tons of corn, lumber down the road on their way to Bob Brothers Co-operative. Yes, the timely application of Round-up and fertilizers and lime, the placement of drainage tiles and waterways are all critical to the per-acre-yield. But it is the work of Creation and a loving God who sends the sun and the rain to fall in its season on the fields of both the just and the unjust which causes things to grow.

And so the congregations in our little country and small town meetings and churches host the Annual Harvest Dinner. The doors are flung wide, and all the neighbors are invited to the carry-in meal feast. From grateful hearts we raise our voices in hymns of thanksgiving:

Come ye thankful people come  
Raise the song of harvest home

All is safely gathered in, ere the winter storms begin  
God our Maker doth provide, for our wants to be supplied  
Come to God's own temple, come  
Raise the song of harvest home.

“How grateful we are, oh God, for this year's crop. How grateful I am, oh God, for your faithful enduring grace and love. Give thanks to the Lord for his mercy endures forever. Amen.” The minister reflects on the blessings and lives of those gathered and of those who could not be in attendance this evening. It is a time when gratitude for babies born and lives well lived, for the every day common happenings of our lives are lifted in praise to a loving and faithful God. It is good to step out of the hurry and pause for a moment to say “Thank You, Lord, thank you.”

Then as we move into the official Advent Season – those four Sundays leading up to the birth of the baby Jesus – *anticipation* is added to the season's emotional mix. For me there is no finer time than that of *expectant waiting* when our faith carries us right up to the moment of divine happening when God's promise is fulfilled. The discipline of joyous expectation heightens our awareness of God's presence and activity in the world and in our ordinary lives.

When we were kids, my sister and I had a whole series of rituals we enacted designed to hurry along Christmas Eve when we could finally carry the presents down from Dad's study and lay them under the tree, but even then we knew that nothing we did would speed up time nor slow it down. But the rituals allowed us to enter into the spirit of the season and the joy of the preparations that were being made for us. Similarly, we are invited to join the rhythm of what God is doing amongst us as we journey toward Christmas Morn.

By moving through these days in anticipation of the arrival of the long expected Jesus, a space is created within our spirits to receive God's daily good news: you are loved unconditionally, you are invited to the banquet table, and even you shall not walk through the valley of the shadow of death unaccompanied ever again.



Photo by Mark Oppenlander.

Come, thou long expected Jesus,  
Born to set thy people free;  
From our fears and sins release us;  
Let us find our rest in thee.  
Israel's Strength and Consolation, Hope of all the earth thou art;  
Dear Desire of every nation, Joy of every longing heart.

May your hearts be filled with the dynamic duo of Thanksgiving and Expectant Waiting when we come to God with grateful hearts and spirits longing for the rebirth that awaits us at this wonderful time of the year.

Patricia Thomas has served on the Board of GOOD NEWS *Associates* since its inception in 1998 and as President of the Board since 2004. A graduate of the Earlham School of Religion in 1990, she is currently serving as Clerk of the Board of Advisors. She is an active member of the Wilmington Yearly Meeting of Friends (Quakers) and joyously living into her retirement years on her husband's family farm complete with hogs, cows, chickens, ducks, dogs, cats and horses.



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