CANTATA 2026--READINGS and LYRICS

Christmastime (arr. Larson)

Ring Christmas bells, ring them loud with a message bringing peace on the earth, tidings of good cheer! Come, carolers, come and join with the angels singing, "Joy to the world!" Christmastime is here! Children, gather around and listen. You'll hear the sound of angels filling the sky telling ev'ryone Chrismastime is here! Loved ones close to our hearts and strangers in lands afar together sharing the joy; Emmanuel! Go, tell the world! He has come to dwell! The time is here! With one voice, let the world rejoice! Ring Christmas bells....

A Call to Christmas (Miller/Tune: Schedryk)

"Come one, come all, " the angels call to shepherds in their fields. "Come see the Infant in the stall, before Whom heaven kneels." Arise! Arise! "Come one, come all," the angels call to Magi from afar. "The birth foretold in songs of old, beneath a wandering star." Arise! Arise! People, arise! Come see the holy Child! Arise! They listened well; the Scriptures tell of how they traveled to see, with wondrous joy, the baby Boy Who's born to set them free. Arise! Arise! The angel's song still carries on; it sings to us today. It echoes true for me and you, a call to endless praise! Arise! Arise! People, arise! Come see the holy Child! Arise! "Come one, come all," the angels call. O Emmanuel. "Come one, come all," the angels call, "to worship Christ the King. A Child is born, Emmanuel, for whom the heavens ring! Come and arise, come to the Child, all of the world, come to the Light! Emmanuel, raise the Noel, let heaven sing, born is the King! Let ev'ry hall echo the call to one and all, great and the small: O holy night, wonderful sight, He is alive! Come to the Christ! Come and arise, come to the Child, all of the world, come to the Light! Arise!

(READING #1)

C.elebrate God's Goodness: Rejoice in the Lord Always

READER 1: Anxiety. It's a low-grade fear. An edginess, a dread. A cold wind that won't stop howling. Anxiety is a meteor shower of what-ifs. It is trepidation—a suspicion, an apprehension. Life in a minor key with major concerns. Anxiety and fear are cousins but not twins. Fear sees a threat. Anxiety imagines one.

It is not God's will that we lead a life of perpetual anxiety. It is not God's will that we face every day with dread and trepidation. He made us for more than a life of breath-stealing angst and mind-splitting worry. Anxiety is often the consequence of perceived chaos. If we sense we are victims of unseen, turbulent, random forces, we are troubled. Most stressed-out people are control freaks. They fail at the quest they most pursue. The more they try to control the world, the more they realize they cannot control the world. Life becomes a cycle of anxiety, failure; anxiety, failure, anxiety, failure.

We cannot take control because control is not ours to take.

READER 2: Rejoice in the LORD always. GOD is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Other people see the problems of the world and wring their hands. We see the problems of the world and bend our knees. The mind cannot at the same time be full of GOD and full of fear.

READER 3: Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way: When Jesus' mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. When Joseph planned to dismiss her quietly, an angel of the LORD appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child is from the Holy Spirit. You are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All of this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." [1]

Christ Our Emmanuel (John Rutter)

> *Far away, far away shines a light, Leading us, guiding us on thro' the night; Clear in the sky and brighter than the dawn, pointing our way to where a child is born. Can it be here we will find him? In a simple stable can it be Messiah we behold? Softly enter, this is he; Worship him, honor him, bow your knee. Son of God, yet child of man, In excelsis gloria! Lullaby, lullaby, Jesus sleep! Angels over you watch will keep. Mary will sing a tender lullaby, Joining the song of angel choirs on high. Morning will come, he will waken, he will be forsaken, Left to die alone upon the tree. Lullaby, lullaby, holy child Born of Mary undefiled. Suffering, dying, death defying, Christ our Emmanuel. Ah, Son of God, yet child of man, In excelsis gloria, gloria!*

(READING #2)

A. sk God for Help: Let your requests be made known to God

READER 1: Anxiety is needless because God is near. Clutch the presence of God with both hands. Before lashing out in fear, look up in faith. Present the challenge to your Father and ask for help. Contagious calm will happen to the degree that we turn to him. Peace happens when people pray. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. As you sense anxiety welling up inside you, cast it in the direction of Christ. Do so specifically and immediately.

The path to peace is paved with prayer. What we have in Christ is greater than anything you don't have in life.[2]

READER 2: On the night when Jesus was born, I wonder if Joseph ever prayed, "Father, this all seems so…bizarre. The angel you sent? Any chance you could send another? Some company would be nice." You've stood where Joseph stood. Caught between what God says and what makes sense. You've asked if you're still on the right road. Things have not turned out as you thought they would. We know what it's like to search the night for a light. Not outside a stable but perhaps outside an emergency room or beside

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[1] Matthew 1:18-25

[2] Anxious for Nothing: Finding Calm in a Chaotic World, p.

a grave of a loved one. We've asked our questions. We've questioned God's plan. And we've wondered why God does what he does.

READER 3: The Bethlehem sky was not the last to hear the pleadings of an honest heart. And perhaps God didn't answer every question for Joseph. But God answered the most important one. "Are you still with me, God?" And through the first cries of Jesus the answer came. "Yes, Joseph. I am with you." Through the small face of the stable-born baby, he says yes. Yes, your sins are forgiven. Yes, your name is written in heaven. Yes, death has been defeated. And yes, God has entered your world. Emmanuel. God is with us.[3]

A Celtic Cradle Carol (Joseph Martin)

> *Hush, my dear One, sleep is calling. Rest, as starshine warms the night. Hearts are glowing; cattle lowing. In the stable, there is light. Angels guard You; none shall harm You. Dream, my Child, in heav'nly peace. In a manger, far from danger, shepherds guard on bended knees. In the silnce, Love is sleeping; no more weeping, all is well. In the shadows, eyes are gazing. Hearts are praising; spirits swell. Hear the singing; music ringing, angels bringing songs of joy. Alleluia, alleluia. Glory to the baby Boy. Love divine, all loves excelling, Joy of heav'n to earth come down. Fix in us Thy humble dwelling; all Thy faithful mercies crown. Jesus, Thou art all compassion. Pure, unbounded love Thou art. Visit us with Thy salvation. Enter ev'ry trembling heart. Alleluia.*

(READING #3)

Leave Your Concerns with Him—With thanksgiving

READER 1: The widest river in the world is not the Mississippi, Amazon, or Nile. The widest river on earth is a body of water called If Only. Throngs of people stand on its banks and cast longing eyes over the waters. They desire to cross but can't seem to find the ferry. They are convinced the If Only river separates them from the good life. If only I were thinner. If only I were richer. If only the kids would come. If only the kids were gone. If only I could leave home, move home, get married, get divorced. If only…I would have the good life.

Are you standing on its shore? Does it seem the good life is always one "if only" away? One purchase away? One promotion away? One election, transition, or romance away? If so, then we've traced your anxiety back to one of its sources. You're in a hurry to cross the river and worried that you never will. Consequently, you work long hours, borrow more money, take on new projects, and pile on more responsibilities. Stress. Debt. Short nights. Long days. All part of the cost of the ticket to the land of the good life, right?

READER 2: Not according to the apostle Paul. The good life begins, not when circumstances change but when our attitude toward them does. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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[3] In the Manger

READER 3: Gratitude leads us off the riverbank of If Only and escorts us into the fertile valley of Already. Count the blessings you have already. As you look at your blessings, take note of what happens. Anxiety grabs his bags and slips out the back door. Worry refuses to share the heart with gratitude.

Sleep, Little Lion, Sleep, Little Lamb (Heather Sorenson)

> *Jesus, in Your manger lie, go to sleep under starry sky. All the world has said goodnight, waiting for the morning light. (3x) So sleep little Lion, sleep little Lamb. Close Your eyes and slumber while You can. Save Your power, save Your might. The battle begins with the morning light. So sleep little Lion, sleep little Lamb. Earth is cradling the Great I Am. Hush little cry. Hush little roar. Nighttime lingers, so rest some more. Soon enough, You will fight our war. Jesus, in Your manger lie, go to sleep under starry sky....*

(READING #4)

M.editate on Good Things—Think about things that are worthy of praise

READER 1: No matter the age, questions fall like hailstones. Will I make enough money? Make any friends? Will I be able to manage to survive? You feel a twitch in the back of your neck. Suddenly a new strand of anxiety worms its way into your mind. *Oh no, a tumor. Just like Granddad. He spent a year in chemotherapy. How will I endure chemo and a new job? Will my insurance cover the bills?*

READER 2: The thoughts rage through your mind like a tornado through a Kansas prairie. You cover your head with a pillow and feel like crying. What a mess. What does all this anxiety mean? All this fear? Trepidation? Restlessness? Insecurity? What does it mean?

Simply this: you are human. Christians battle anxiety. However, there is a pathway out of the valley of fret. God used the pen of Paul to sketch the map.

READER 3: Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

READER 1: Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

This Child Shall Be Our Peace (Molly Ijames)

> *This Child shall be our peace. A hush upon the stable, a humble manger bed. A weary mother stroking her sleeping baby's head. An echo in her mem'ry of ancient prophecies: this Child of Mary's labor. This child shall be our peace. A flock of sheep awakened, a flood of glorious light, a band of fearful shepherds illumined in the night. The angel voices swelling, their message to release: The Lamb will be our Shepherd, this Child will be our peace. This earthborn Child of Heaven, this fleshbound Son of God, this Man who bore our sorrows, this Lamb who shed His blood. He stills our raging anger, He heals our hopeless grief, calms our frantic worry, He helps our unbelief.*

Beneath His righteous scepter He makes all war to cease. Come bow the knee before Him. This child shall be our peace, our peace.

Ding, Dong, Merrily on High (Benjamin David Knoedler)

Ding dong merrily on high! In heav'n the bells are ringing; ding dong verily the sky is riven with angels singing. Gloria! Hosanna in excelsis! E'en so here below, below, let steeple bells be swungen, and i-o, i-o, i-o, by priest and people sungen. Ding dong, gloria! Gloria, hosanna in excelsis! Pray ye dutifully prime your matin chime, ye ringers; may ye beautifully rhyme your evetime song, ye singers. Gloria! Hosanna in excelsis! Hosanna in excelsis!