

# CELEBRATING ADVENT AT WESTMONT COLLEGE

with Steve Bell

## “The Feast of Father John of Kronstadt”

OPENING SONG:

***Peace Be Unto You***

*Hebrew Traditional*

*Album: Keening for the Dawn (Steve Bell)*

Peace be unto you  
From the watching angels  
Ye watching angels from on high  
Peace from the King  
The ruler over all things  
The Holy One  
Blessed be He

And may your comings  
Ever be in peace  
And watched by angels from on high  
From the King, the ruler over all things  
The Holy One  
Blessed be He

Bless us with peace  
Ye watching angels who bring peace  
Ye watching angels from on high  
Peace from the King  
The ruler over all things  
The Holy One  
Blessed be He

And may your goings  
Ever be in peace  
And watched by angels from on high  
From the King, the ruler over all things  
The Holy One  
Blessed be He

## *Welcome to a Feast of Seasons!*

Before considering one of my favorite feasts within the season of Advent (the Feast of St. John of Kronstadt, Dec 12) let's first remember that Advent is not only a season of various feasts and Saints days which includes, among others, that very important Feast of St. Nicholas on December 6, but Advent itself belongs to a broader *feast of seasons* called Christmastide. The fullness of Christmastide includes Advent (four weeks before Christmas), Christmas (12 days), and Epiphany which, in some traditions takes us right up until Lent.

Whereas the central figure of Advent is Mary, and which celebrates the mystery of the human person elevated to maternal spouse of God in bringing Christ to the world, Christmas and Epiphany consider the two natures of Christ (fully human, fully divine), the one to whom our souls are wed.

During the twelve days of Christmas, we consider the astonishing humility and tenacious solidarity of God who condescends to enter history as one of us. Fully human! During Christmas, we not only celebrate Jesus birth on Christmas day, but his human vulnerability as a refugee fleeing Herod on the Feast of the Holy Innocents on Dec. 28, and the very human experience of receiving a name on January 1st (Hebrew tradition names the child at eight days old.)

During the season of Epiphany, we celebrate the revelation of Jesus' divinity beginning with the Feast of the Coming of the Magi (Jan 6) were we remember the invitational celestial sign of Christ's birth to the Persian astronomers (outsiders), forever decoupling the gospel with racial or national privilege. We also remember the Wedding Feast of Cana where another sign, the miracle of water to wine, reveals Jesus as Lord over matter. Fully divine!

This next song, "Old Sage," is an imaginative retelling of the story of the Magi though the voice of one of the wise men some 30-40 years after the birth of Christ. Now he is an old man, wistfully recalling that strange nocturnal journey he took as a younger man to honour a child whose identity he couldn't begin to comprehend, but whose memory haunts him still with a sort of unsettled hope.

SECOND SONG:

***Old Sage***

*Lyric by Steve Bell and Jamie Howison*

*Music by Steve Bell*

*Album: The Feast of Seasons (Steve Bell)*

I remember how it started still  
Those are days that I remember well  
It was something in the stars that was new enough to tell  
There was something going down

So we set out for a foreign land  
With no idea what we just might find  
'Cause when you're following a star  
You have to walk at night  
Sounds crazy even now

And still the search goes on for  
My way back home  
I can't go back the way I've known

And now the road for me has changed  
Nothing seems to look the same  
Don't get me wrong, I'm not complaining  
And every star along the way  
Holds the promise for the day  
When I will be at home again  
Yeah... yeah..

Some tell me I'm a wise man  
A kind-of sage. You know, it makes me laugh  
'Cause I don't know what I'm not  
Barely know what I am  
If you know what I mean

But everybody can remember when  
They had to stop and start all over again  
It was something 'bout that boy in Bethlehem  
I will never be the same

And still the search goes on for...

## *The Feast of Father John of Kronstadt (Dec. 20)*

Father John of Kronstadt is a Saint of the Eastern Orthodox Church who lived in Russia in the late 1800's. His book of daily meditations called *My Life In Christ* is one I have cherished for years and return to often. There is a depth of hope and joy there which flies against the grim dreariness of the town and the days in which he lived. "Every blade of grass," he wrote, "every flower seems to whisper to us: Here is God!"

The town of Kronstadt, which he served as a Priest, was a notoriously rough town known for alcoholism and violence. But he never lost sight of the fundamental dignity of every human being created to flame out with the fire of God's divine love. Fr. John taught that the human person was like a piece of iron, which when left in a fire, takes on the qualities of that fire. First heat, and then light. As it is the nature of Iron to take on the nature of fire, so too, he taught (echoing Athanasius), the human person is to lay their lives in the fire of God's divine love in order to become by grace what God is by nature.

When Fr. John encountered men and woman whose lives had been distorted by base behaviours, he wouldn't judge them as worthless or as failures. He would simply declare that their state was beneath their dignity. And he said so with such conviction and love, that folks simply believed him, many rising to their dignity like a sapling rises to the sun.

### THIRD SONG:

#### ***Burning Ember***

*Music and lyrics by Steve Bell*

*Album: Burning Ember (Steve Bell)*

Judge for yourself how great is the one  
Who lives in God – whose God is love  
Like an iron when left in embers bright  
Everything if fire – everything is light  
Oh Love, how beautiful You are  
Oh flame of joy within my heart

Burning ember  
I remember Love's first light in me  
I was cold then  
Like a stone when I saw Your flickering  
Oh what beauty as You drew near me  
I could scarcely speak  
Somehow, I knew  
I would be new in your glowing

*(cont.)*

Judge for yourself if a fire isn't safe  
When cities fall before her face  
Yet a flower can endure the course of a storm  
When bowing to the tempest's rage  
Oh Love, more fierce than all the rest  
Oh raging joy within my breast

Burning ember  
I remember Love's first light in me  
I was cold then  
Like a stone when I saw Your flickering  
Burn forever  
Let me never curse the pain You bring  
Somehow, I know  
I will be whole in Your burning

Oh Love, more lovely than the rest  
Oh flame of joy within my breast

Burning ember  
Shine forever in the darkest tomb  
Warmth of heaven  
Hidden secret in a mother's womb  
Flame of beauty  
Blazing through me so that all might see  
Somehow, we know  
We'll all be whole in Your burning  
In Your burning  
In Your burning

*For more about Steve Bell and his music, please visit [www.stevebell.com](http://www.stevebell.com)*