

Hymns and Songs for an **Advent Intercultural Hymn Festival**

Selection and Commentary by Bruce Harding

The following list of songs with accompanying commentary can be combined with seasonal prayers and scripture readings to create an Advent hymn festival, with the songs leaning into Christmas anticipation toward the end of the list. Many of these songs come from Indigenous communities around the world. By learning them and integrating them into our ongoing corporate worship, we can live into the hope for a better tomorrow, which is so much a part of Advent tradition.

1. “O-So-So”/“Come Now, O God of Peace” *Voices United* (VU) 34 (Korea)

“O-So-So” or “Come Now, O God of Peace” is one verse adapted from a four-verse hymn with words and music by Geonyong Lee of South Korea. Lee, a well-known composer and past president of Korean National University of Arts, originally wrote the piece as a prayer for peace, reconciliation, and the reunification of North and South Korea, but it has made its way around the world as a universal prayer for peace, particularly through the work of the World Council of Churches. The melody is in a five-tone scale similar to the Western minor mode, and in triple time, which is typical of Korean music. Try singing it gently, with reverence and longing.

2. “All Earth Is Waiting” VU 5 (Spain)

Alberto Taulé, a Spanish priest and composer from Barcelona, wrote this hymn in the early 1970s, an early example of a hymn melding liberation theology with the Advent promise of the Saviour to come. The 1989 *United Methodist Hymnal* provided the English translation that is in common use (as appears in *Voices United* and other recent hymnals). The melodically open ending for the first three verses conveys the urgency of the message, while the final ending on the tonic for the fourth verse brings the hymn to a satisfying close. If you wish to try one or all of the verses in the original Spanish, it is published on various websites, for example:

<http://elcancionerocatolico.blogspot.ca/2015/11/toda-la-tierra-espera-al-salvador-autor.html>.

3. “Joy Shall Come” VU 23 (Israel)

This traditional Israeli song came into wider use around the world in the 1960s, when it first began appearing in folk and global song collections such as *Risk: New Hymns for a New Day*, Vol. II, No. 3 (1966). Isaiah 35 provided the inspiration for the text with its imagery of living springs and a desert bursting into bloom. I have fond memories as a young child in the early 1970s of singing this song while circle dancing with a grapevine step at church gatherings, starting slowly and then gradually increasing the tempo and energy of the song with each repetition.

4a. “Kyrie Eleison” VU 946 (Russian Orthodox)

This setting of the Kyrie Eleison (the ancient Greek prayer for mercy) was introduced to the Canadian church through the World Council of Churches gathering in Vancouver in 1983. It has appeared in hymn books throughout the world since that time. The simplicity of the melody

and harmony make this a good song to sing in harmony with a congregation, particularly if a group of singers can help to lead the parts. To capture more of the essence of Russian Orthodox singing, encourage bass singers to take the lowest part.

4b. “Oré Poriajú” *More Voices* (MV) 68 (Guaraní, Paraguay)

The Guaraní people, an Indigenous community in Paraguay and surrounding areas of Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and Bolivia, have been violently persecuted for centuries by colonial powers. When singing this hauntingly beautiful song, often translated as a cry for mercy using the traditional language of the ancient Kyrie, sing it in solidarity with the Guaraní, and with Indigenous peoples throughout the world who struggle for freedom, dignity, and the right to preserve their culture and homelands. It sings well in four-part harmony, or with a strong unison melody accompanied with “oo-ing,” either improvised or as indicated in the top line of the score.

5. “Mayenziwe” MV 151 (South Africa)

Gobingca George Mxadana is a South African musician, composer, and choir director, founder of the Imilonji Kantu Choral Society, a pioneering choir in the fight against apartheid and in the celebration of Indigenous choral traditions in South Africa. “Mayenziwe” is a traditional Xhosa setting of “Your will be done,” a phrase from the Prayer of Jesus, taught by Mxadana to his choir and to visiting musicians from abroad, and now appearing in various versions in hymnals around the world. Don’t rush the singing; enjoy the longing and anticipation of the words and encourage the call and response harmony, either out of the book or improvised.

6. “Asato Ma Sad Gamaya”/“From the Unreal, Lead to the Real” (see below) India

“Asato ma sad gamaya,” the Pavamana Mantra, is a true interfaith song, originally from ancient Hindu tradition and adopted by Christians in India as a bhajan (a devotional song), with many different melodies. Our version here is a traditional melody, with the addition of a prayer for peace—the “Om Shanti” at the end. Try singing it in unison before adding harmonies, with simple percussion for accompaniment and a chordal instrument such as guitar or piano to provide chordal accompaniment. For the final repetition, repeat the “Om Shanti” prayer three times to close.

7. “Ka mana’o ’I’O” MV103 (Hawaii)

Joe Camacho is a church musician and multi-instrumentalist from Hawaii who writes new music for worship while also working to celebrate the vitality of Indigenous Hawaiian culture. The lack of an English alternative for the Hawaiian text in the refrain of this song intentionally invites us to learn a little bit of Hawaiian (a pronunciation guide is at the bottom of the page), thereby singing in solidarity with the Indigenous population. At the same time, the meaning of the Hawaiian words is clear, since it is immediately repeated in English: “Faithful, faithful is our God.” The simplicity and beauty of this song lends itself well to guitar or ukulele accompaniment, and the refrain is easily harmonized by ear.

8. “Jesus Came Bringing Us Hope*” MV33 (Cameroon)

This traditional song from Cameroon has been appearing in hymn collections quite frequently since the 1990s. More commonly published as “He came down that we may have hope*,” our *More Voices* version eliminates the descending redeemer imagery, instead naming Jesus specifically as the source of our hope, peace, joy, and love*. Try singing it for Advent in the present tense, as “Jesus comes bringing us hope.” Then during the Christmas season you can sing it in the past tense, as printed in the book.

*Change the wording to fit the Sunday of Advent.

9. “Jesus, Jesus, O What a Wonderful Child” (see below) USA, African-American

As with songs from many oral traditions, the origin of this gospel song celebrating the coming of the Christ child is unclear. Recorded versions began appearing in the 1950s as “Glory to the Newborn King,” with more recent versions (under the title “Jesus, Jesus...”) covered by artists like Mariah Carey and John Legend. Regardless of its provenance, the infectious hope and anticipation of the text are well-matched by the melody, and a gospel harmonization reinforces the “bluesy” character of the music.

10. “Yesu Supriya” MV 210 (India)

“Yesu Supriya” is an anonymous Christian bhajan (devotional song) from India, first introduced to the wider church in the late 1970s through *Cantate Domino*, the hymnal of the World Council of Churches. Try singing this simple song of blessing to close your festival or service, with a simple drone and hand drum accompaniment as given in the score.

asato mā sad gamaya/
From the Unreal, Lead to the Real

♩=88

D Cm D

a-sa-to mā sad ga-ma-ya, ta-ma-so mā jyo - tir ga-ma-ya, mṛ-tyor mā am-ṛ-
Lead me from false-hood to truth, lead me from dark-ness to light, lead me from

Cm D Cm D

taṃ ga-ma-ya death to life. om shan-ti, om shan-ti, om shan - ti.
om shan-ti*, om shan-ti, om shan - ti.

* Shanti = peace.

Sanskrit prayer: The Pavamana Mantra, from *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (1.3.28.)
Music: Hindu mantra. Arrangement/adaptation copyright © 2017 by Bruce Harding. All rights reserved.
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Jesus, O What a Wonderful Child!

♩=72 Swing

Chords: G, C⁷, G, Em⁷, A⁹, D⁷, G, G/B, G⁷/B, C⁷, C[#]o⁷, G/D, D⁷, G, F⁷, E⁷, B^b9, A⁷(b⁹), D⁷, G, D⁷(b⁹), G

Lyrics:
 Je-sus, Je-sus, O what a won-der-ful Child! Je-sus, Je-sus, so
 ho-ly, meek and mild. New life, new hope, new joy he brings, won't you lis-ten to the
 an-gels sing, "Glo-ry! Glo-ry! Glo - ry!"Let the hea - vens ring!

Annotations: *repeats*, *G last time*

Words and music: Traditional African-American spiritual, public domain.
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