

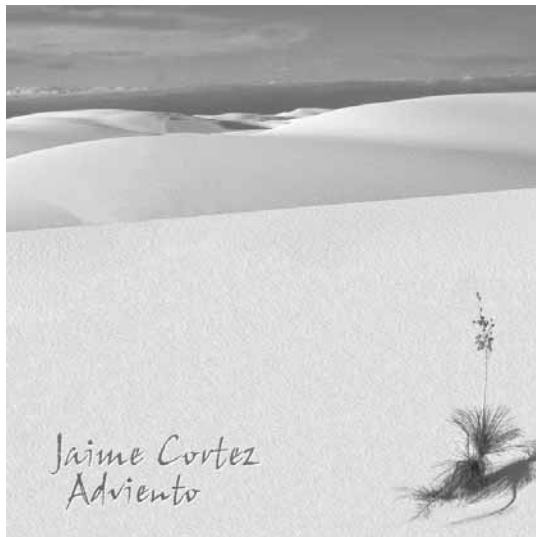


Advent

A Time to Rejoice and Sing!

Many people in our Church, including myself, consider Advent one of their favorite seasons. There is much imagery in the Scriptures, much anticipation in the air. There is also that fascinating dilemma of trying to hear God's promises in the chill of the night while the rest of the world is caught in a whirlwind of high-paced consumerism and challenging contradictions about the season. When our Church is celebrating Advent, the rest of the world is singing Christmas carols, and when our Christmas season does arrive, our neighbors are dumping their used Christmas trees in the city bin for recycling.

Come what may, the Scripture readings at Advent speak of wonderful news. Our God has heard us and will fulfill the promise of sending a savior. The Son of God will come and God will walk among us, an enormous step forward in God's relationship with humanity. We are asked to wait and we are asked to be prepared. Isaiah 12 asks us to cry out with joy and gladness, for among us is the great and Holy One of Israel. I have always found these readings to be so upbeat and hopeful. I have also been puzzled about how we rarely react with more zest and joy about these readings, at least musically speaking.



The moment I decided to create a collection of songs for Advent, I also decided to bring forth some of that feeling of rejoicing that the Scriptures describe so beautifully. I wanted to do this by using the Scriptures from the season and also by using upbeat rhythms and musical arrangements that were joyful and fresh. Thus was born the collection *Adviento*, my newest work with OCP (20247TL). I wrote most of this new music by reading the Scriptures and studying a few commentaries. I would like to share with you how some of these titles came to light.

“Rejoice Over Us With Gladness”

“Rejoice Over Us With Gladness” was the first song I wrote for this collection. It is based on Zephaniah 3:14-18, the first reading selection for the Third Sunday of Advent, Year C. Zephaniah is describing the day on which God would sweep away all things from the face of the earth since much disrespect and idolatry had flourished in Jerusalem. When God is done changing and purifying, Jerusalem will find peace and people will be able to exist in a humble and honest manner. On that day, the Lord God will turn all enemies away and there will be no more judgment against Jerusalem.

“[The Lord] will rejoice over you with gladness, and renew you in his love” is a line from the reading that stuck out for me. In the song, I decided to put us (the people of God today) in the place of Jerusalem. As in the reading, we shout for joy and the Lord rejoices over us in gladness and renews us in his love.

“Mi Alma Glorifica al Señor”

An image that has made an impact in my life is that of Mary saying “yes” to the angel and beginning to think about the ramifications of the fulfillment of her mission.

When Mary answers her cousin Elizabeth with what we know as the Cantic of Mary in the Gospel reading for the Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year C (Luke 1:39-45), she is really describing a world that

must have seemed impossible, a world where all things would be turned around, where the mighty would be cast down from their thrones, the hungry filled with good things, the proud scattered, and the lowly lifted. Those who loved God would have his mercy and would live in joy.

I have always thought that Mary must have had to feel some level of anticipation and a great deal of joy since she was partially in the know, so to speak. She knew God had smiled on Jerusalem and would be coming to make things right. She must have felt a level of secret joy.

I always wanted to portray this piece of Scripture with music that suited a sixteen-year-old, since Mary was about that age when all this happened to her. I wanted it to be cheerful and joyful and filled with gratitude and expectation in a way that was youthful and fresh. “Mi Alma Glorifica Al Señor” has the text of Mary’s Magnificat put to music that is vibrant and joyful. It strives to sing this powerful prayer in a way that makes those words memorable.

“Nothing Is Impossible”

The song “Nothing Is Impossible” shares the spirit of “Mi Alma Glorifica al Señor” in a more contemporary way. Andy Andino and I wrote this song together. I recall the conversation revolving around the question, What would it be like if God gave this powerful task to a young woman today? We wrote several lines of notes based on the expressions in the Cantic of Mary. Later I put music to those ideas, and Andy created the beautiful guitar part at the beginning of the song. We hope music ministers share this song with their assemblies. It’s a song of hope in times when hope seemed unlikely, and it reminds us that nothing is impossible with God.

“Dios Mismo Vendrá”

On the Third Sunday of Advent, Year A, the prophet Isaiah conveys images similar to those expressed by Mary: things that seem impossible but become

possible with the mercy of God (see Isaiah 35:1-6a, 10).

I have always wanted to put this Scripture into music. John the Baptist seems to have a mixture of urgency and madness here, and his warnings are poignant yet joyful. I wanted the music to this text to have that sense of urgency and a little anxiety, too. Andy found a great way of doing this by putting a lot of drums and other Latin percussion instruments in a pattern that gives a perfect driving rhythm. This is one of my favorite songs in *Adviento*.

“Porque Me Ha Ungido”

Similar in tone to “Dios Mismo Vendrá,” “Porque Me Ha Ungido” is based on the first reading from Isaiah (61:1-2a, 10-11) for the Third Sunday of Advent, Year B. Isaiah describes what the Spirit of the Lord asks of him. The to-do list is undeniably arduous, but we are reminded that, with God, all things are attainable.

When working on this song, I knew that I wanted the music to have a sense of urgency and anticipation. This is why the song has a strong rhythm and a South American dance flavor in a minor key.

“Abran el Camino al Señor”

On the Second Sunday of Advent, Year B, Isaiah announces the arrival of our God: “Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low” (Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11). I’m sure you can see the pattern emerging. All these unlikely things happen!

I wrote “Abran el Camino al Señor” as a rock ballad aimed at sounding like an announcement straight from Isaiah. Some parts are meant to be sung by a soloist and some by the entire assembly. The music marries well with the text, which is delivered in a vibrant way that I pray young people will feel attracted to, my intention being that they will remember this Scripture in their hearts.

“Letanía de Adviento/Advent Litany” and “Light of the World/Luz del Mundo”

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I’ve grouped these two songs together because they are both very special slow ballads.

“Letanía de Adviento/Advent Litany” was written as a mysterious song that can be sung as a prelude to singing “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.” It was designed for parishes that light the Advent wreath as a part of their gathering rite. Many people have used this song in their parishes as a beautiful way to begin the Advent Masses.

“Light of the World/Luz del Mundo” was written because I wanted to have a song that was a bit more introspective. Although many in the Scriptures wanted vindication for the oppression they had suffered, I am positive they couldn’t have been loud and assertive about it all the time. I imagined what it would be like to be awakened in the middle of the night wishing God would hear our plea. I imagined a quiet moment between one person and God. I used the entrance and Communion antiphons as the texts for the verses.

Adviento was designed as a fresh, youthful approach to the wonderful Advent Scriptures that fill us with hope and joy. I pray that all musicians who sing these songs for their assemblies can transmit the joy of this season and help their communities keep these lovely words in their hearts. Rejoice, for God is with us!

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Jaime Cortez is a talented and popular composer, arranger, and performer. Born in New York and raised in El Salvador, Jaime is fluent in both Spanish and English and has dedicated a portion of his ministry to promoting better Hispanic liturgies and bringing cultures together for worship. He holds a bachelor’s degree in music composition from Arizona State University and is director of music and liturgy at Holy Cross Church in Mesa, Arizona, where he lives with his wife, Kari, and their three children.