



II CORINTHIANS VESPERS

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Readers may recall that in the Summer 2011 issue of *LF* I shared my Exodus Matins. Its origin was a longing for a more intense liturgical experience of the Scriptures in contrast to the typically broad rather than deep approach taken by traditional liturgies. Some time after its publication, I had the great joy of praying the Exodus Matins during chapel at Luther Seminary, accompanied by a splendid pianist and led by *LF*'s own hymn editor, Sally Messner. This book-specific approach to liturgy seemed to strike a chord (pardon the pun), so I have given it another try with this II Corinthians Vespers.

Somehow it seems inappropriate to have a favorite book of the New Testament and for Lutherans even a bit disloyal to choose something other than Romans or Galatians or possibly the Gospel of John. But I must confess the truth that II Corinthians is indeed my favorite (the other three competing for second place, of course). I am particularly captivated by its consistent use of exchange language and imagery, the total entanglement of the divine-human Christ with his human sisters and brothers, and theirs with each other through him. I am astounded again and again by the christology and soteriology of 5:21, "For our sake He made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." I have tried to give these and other themes a chance to shine through in the liturgy here, modeled on the classical form of Vespers.

Some notes about the liturgy itself. Vespers traditionally opens with *Phos Hilarion*, called in the LBW "Joyous Light of Glory"; here, the text follows Paul's connection of the Genesis account of the creation of light with the light that is Christ himself, to the tune of "O Jesus, I Have Promised." (It will also work with "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded.") I realize that the psalmody, entitled "Aroma of Christ," will probably elicit snickers from a certain age group, but Paul

makes such striking use of the traditional incense imagery of prayer (Psalm 141 is normally used in Vespers) in talking about Christ as mediator between us and the Father that it seemed worth the risk of a few snorts of derision. The psalmody's verses quote Paul quoting the Old Testament, in particular Isaiah 49:8, Leviticus 26:12, Exodus 29:45, Jeremiah 31:9 and 33, and II Samuel 7:14 (note that Paul makes a point of including daughters, which the Old Testament verses do not). The tune is my own composition and because the correlation of syllables to notes in the verses is not consistent, it may be better to use a cantor and have the congregation join in on the more straightforward refrain. The suggested psalms are all christological psalms. Any Scripture text(s) can be read, but since the liturgy itself draws so heavily from the New Testament it would be fitting to counterpose a reading from the Old. The canticle, based on Paul's account of his sufferings for the sake of the gospel, can be chanted to any psalm tone, though my own suggestion is: F DEA / D# CD#F. The prayers put especial emphasis on the joyful exchange motif. It may simply be too weird in American culture to end the service with a "holy kiss" (II Corinthians 13:12) instead of a handshake, in which case feel free to white-out that notice at the end. But it would be very much in keeping with the spirit of II Corinthians to conclude with a collection for churches in need, since that is exactly what Paul asked the Corinthians to do in ch. 8.

Vespers is not the most common of services anymore, but this could be used for evening Bible studies—it would be a great match for a study on II Corinthians itself—or midweek Advent and Lent services or even council meetings. If you try it, please let me know what works and what doesn't.

LF

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH (1:3–4, 4:10, 5:15, 8:7, 9:8, 10:5, 12:9–10)

Father of all mercies,

God of all comfort:

Let us share in Christ's sufferings

So we may share in His comfort.

Comfort us in our affliction

So we may comfort others.

Let us learn to be weak

So You will be strong in us.

Let us boast of our weakness

So Your grace will be enough for us.

Let us stop living for ourselves

So we may live for Christ.

Let us carry the death of Jesus within us

So the life of Jesus may be in us too.

Let Your grace abound in us

So we may abound in good works.

Let our every thought be captive to Christ

So we may excel in faith, knowledge, and love.

This and all other needful things we pray

In Jesus' holy name. Amen.

A final hymn may be sung

BENEDICTION & DISMISSAL (5:6–9; 13:11–14)

Always be of good courage, for we walk by faith, not by sight.

Whether at home or away, we make it our aim to please God.

Finally, sisters and brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. And the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

The people may greet one another with a holy kiss (13:12).

A collection may be taken, for churches in need (8:1–15).

II Corinthians Vespers

GREETING AND CONFESSION (1:2; 5:10, 17, 20)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

And also with you.

Sisters and brothers, I invite you to examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive our due for what we have done in the body, whether good or evil.

Silence for self-examination.

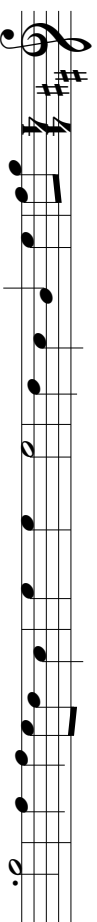
Do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? I implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For in Christ you are a new creation.

The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

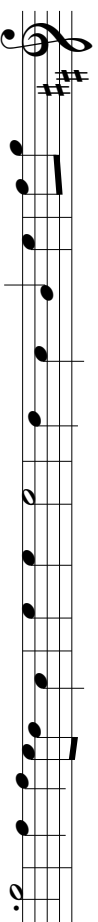
Candles may be lit during the Hymn of Light.

HYMN OF LIGHT (4:6; 5:19–21)

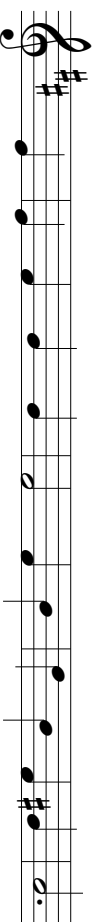
Let Light Shine out of Darkness



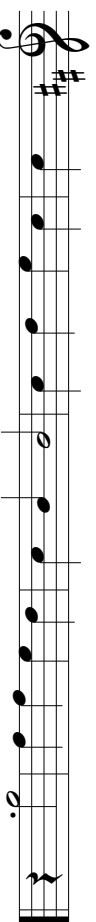
1, 4 "Let light shine out of dark - ness," said God on the first day.



"Shine in our hearts your glo - ry" to Him we dai - ly pray.



This same light shines for - e - ver from Je - sus' ho - ly face,



For in him dwells the Fath - er's own life and love and grace.

2. "Let light shine out of darkness";
the Father's first command.
The Word brought forth the daylight
to shine upon the land.
And now by God's own Spirit
we see the endless light
That is Christ, Jesus' glory
unhidden from our sight.

3. "Let light shine out of darkness,"
we humbly ask of him
Who though he knew no evil
was made to be our sin.
The Father reconciles us
since Christ has died for all;
We who have died with Jesus
now answer to his call.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING (1:21–22, 9:15)

God our Father, You establish us in Christ, anoint us, put Your seal upon us,
and give us Your Spirit in our hearts.

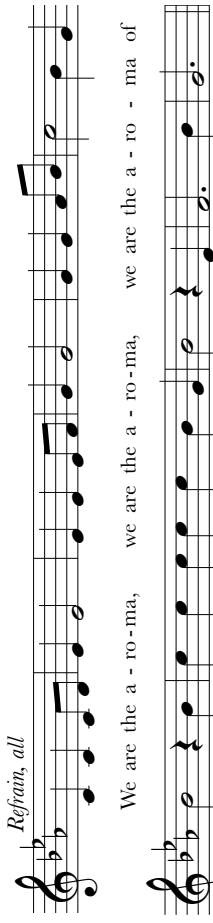
Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift. Amen.

Incense may be burned during the psalmody.

PSALMODY (2:15; 6:2, 16, 18)

Aroma of Christ

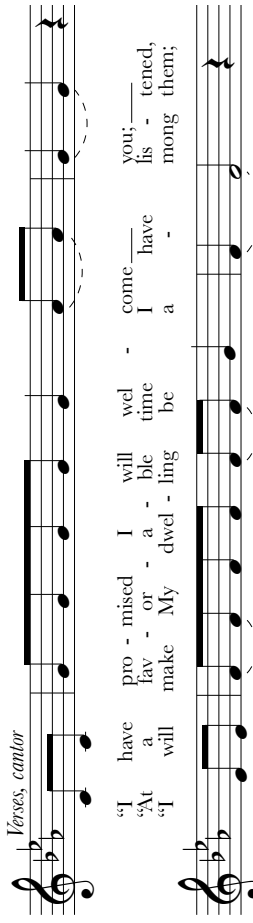
Refrain, all



We are the a - ro - ma, we are the a - ro - ma of

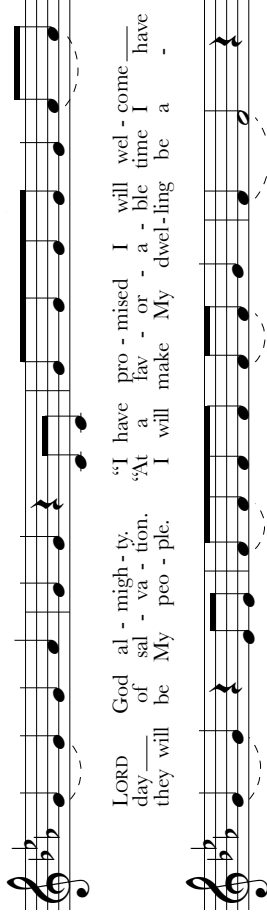
Christ; the fra-grance of the know-ledge of Christ, to God, to God.

Voxes, cantor

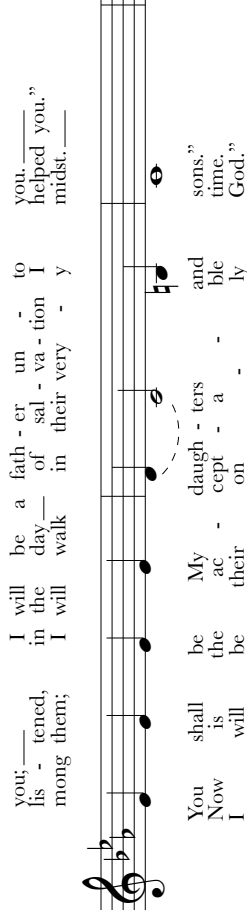


"I have pro - mised I will wel - come you; _____
"At a - a - ble time I have _____ helped you."
"I will make My dwell - ling be a - _____
I will be a fath - er un - to you; _____
in the day _____ of sal - va - tion I _____ helped you."
I will walk _____ in their ver - y _____ midst. _____

You shall be My daugh - ters and _____ the _____
Now is the ac - cept - a - ble _____ sons," _____
I _____ will _____ be _____ their _____ on - ly _____ God, and



LORD God al - migh - ty. I have pro - mised I will wel - come _____
day _____ of sal - va - tion. "At a - a - ble time I _____ have
they will be My peo - ple. I will make My dwell - ling be a - _____



you; _____ I will be a fath - er un - to you; _____
lis - tened, _____ in the day _____ of sal - va - tion I _____ helped you."
mong them; I will walk _____ in their ver - y _____ midst. _____

You shall be My daugh - ters and _____
Now is the ac - cept - a - ble _____ sons."
I will _____ be _____ their _____ time. _____
ly _____ God."

*Psalms 2, 16, 22, 72, 110, 116, or 118 may be chanted or read responsively.
Another hymn may be sung. A Scripture lesson is read.*

ACCLAMATION OF SCRIPTURE (1:19–20)

The Son of God was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes.

For all the promises of God find their Yes in him.

That is why we utter our Amen to God through him.

In Christ's name: Amen.

CANTICLE (4:7–9; 6:8–10)

We have this treasure ' in clay jars—
The might is God's and ' not our own.
We are afflicted ' but not crushed
Perplexed but ' still we hope
We are persecuted ' but not lost
Struck down but ' not destroyed
Taken for impostors ' and yet true
Seem to be strangers ' yet are known
Look like we are dying ' yet we live
Always being punished ' yet not killed
Thought to be in mourning ' we rejoice
Appearing to be poor ' we make rich
They look on us and see ' empty hands
But in Christ we ' have all things.