

# Vespers CITY FOR THE & all who dwell therein

**Tribe of LA  
April 18, 2010**

Presented by Scott Arany  
in fulfillment of  
Fuller Theological Seminary's  
Master of Arts in Worship, Theology, and the Arts



to the greater glory of God.

“The Church and her servants,  
the city and its dwellers,  
shall give praise for Thy salvation;  
Be the voice of peace, O Lord,  
the reward of their voices!”

**Saint Ephrem the Syrian  
the fourth Nisibene hymn**





# INTRODUCTION

## WHY EPHREM?

Saint Ephrem, the “Harp of the Spirit,” lived in the 4<sup>th</sup>-century Syrian cities of Nisibis and Edessa. He is considered a renowned teacher of the church, noted for his many hymns and poems on orthodox faith. During his life in Nisibis, Ephrem served his church and his city through membership with an intentional urban community known as Members of the Covenant, ascetic Christians dedicated to worship renewal, teaching, healing, service, and intercessory prayer. During times of crisis within the city—oft attacked by the Persian Empire striking against the Roman Empire—Ephrem would join his bishop in prayer for the city, penning many hymns, laments, and songs of deliverance that were sung in the city’s voice. Through these elements of worship, Ephrem’s city gained a voice: praising God for mercy, interceding for its urban dwellers, and prophetically speaking out against injustice and silence.

This service is rooted in these urban hymns of Ephrem’s, and hopes to give a voice to our city through worship in song, intercessory prayer, and meditative dwelling in scripture. Ephrem’s themes permeate the service; some songs draw from his own words, others are inspired by his theology and the liturgical traditions of the Vespers form itself.

## WHY A VESPERS?

The Vespers service is one of the final hours of prayer in the order of daily worship practiced by many church and monastic traditions, from Adventists to Orthodox. It is a time of gathering, of coming in from the darkness into light to dwell in the true Light of Christ. At the end, we are sent out into the world we came from to bring and be that Light. The Vespers hour is at that liminal, in-between time of sunset where day and night meet. This liminal space is the perfect meeting ground for the two major arms of the church—its worship and its mission. In this service you’ll hear prayers offered by urban missionaries and workers for God’s kingdom, giving a voice to this city from their unique missional contexts as an offering to God in worship.

## NOTES

This service is presented in fulfillment of Fuller Theological Seminary’s Master of Art’s program in Worship, Theology, and the Arts, intending to show the student’s grasp and integration of those subjects. This service is also intended as a tool and resource for congregations wishing to deepen the connection between their worship and their mission.

I am deeply indebted to my musicians, Eric Dyrhsen (percussion), Brian Lauritzen (cello), Melinda Rice (violin on Friday), Rainbow Underhill (vocals on Sunday), and Daniel Estay (guitar) for their brilliant creativity bringing this music to life. The insight of my faculty mentors, Todd Johnson and Eric Mathis, has been invaluable in shaping this service. My local church communities, the Hollywood Adventist Church and Tribe of LA, for affirming my ministry and challenging me with missional theology. My parents have provided endless love, freedom, and encouragement.

*All for the great glory of God.*



## NOTES

We begin in a place of need for God's help and salvation, seeking God's voice and reward. As our worship continues into the evening, we move from petition and intercession to a place of resting in Christ's grace and glory.

Written in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> or early 4<sup>th</sup> century, the Phos Hilaron is one of the oldest complete hymns still in use by the Christian Church. Its name means joyful or gladdening light. The hymn is traditionally sung at vespers time.

This version is adapted from a translation by British poet and priest, John Keble (1792 - 1866).  
Music by Scott Arany, ©2010.

# the VESPERS LITURGY

## DWELLING IN VISION

*Take these moments of quiet to dwell in this time of sunset and rest. Through the brief, projected video, take in the city, the lights, the movement, the people. What do you see the Holy Spirit bringing to your mind? This is home, this is our city, we are the people who dwell in it...  
... and God is here.*

## INVITATORY

**LEADER:** O God, make speed to save us.

**PEOPLE:** O Lord, make haste to help us.

**LEADER:** The Church and her servants, the city and its dwellers, shall give praise for Thy salvation.

**PEOPLE:** Be the voice of peace, O Lord, the reward of our voices!

**ALL:** Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and evermore shall be, world without end, alleluia, amen.

## HYMN — PHOS HILARON

**CHORUS:** *Hail, gladdening light of pure glory poured!* (Hail, gladdening light) (of pure glory poured!)

**VERSE 1:** Hail, gladdening Light, of His pure glory poured  
Who is immortal Father, heavenly, blest,  
Holy of Holies—Jesus Christ our Lord!

**VERSE 2:** Now we are come to the sun's hour of rest;  
The lights of evening 'round us shine;  
We hymn the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit divine!

**VERSE 3:** Worthy art thou at all times to be sung  
With undefiled tongue,  
Son of our God, giver of life, alone:  
Therefore in all the world thy glories, Lord, they own!



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Luke 24:36, 45-49 (NRSV)

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*Our vespers worship tonight is between Easter and Pentecost. We've experienced the drama of crucifixion and resurrection, and now we wait in the city at Christ's command for the promised Holy Spirit. There is so much we yet long to see fulfilled and revived.*

*Words and music by Scott Arany, ©2009.*

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*A reading of a psalm is traditional in evening vespers.*

## A READING FROM THE GOSPEL

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." [...] Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

## HYMN — WE WAIT

**VERSE 1:** We wait through the sorrows  
We wait through the tears  
We wait for Your mercy  
We wait

**VERSE 2:** We wait in the darkness  
We wait in the night  
We wait for Your glory  
We wait

**CHORUS:** *We wait...we wait... we wait... we wait...*

**VERSE 3:** We long for Your presence  
We hope in Your suffering  
We trust in Your coming  
We wait, we wait

## PSALM 13

How long, O LORD? will You forget me forever?  
How long will You hide your face from me?  
How long must I bear pain in my soul,  
and have sorrow in my heart all day long?  
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?  
Consider and answer me, O LORD my God!  
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,  
and my enemy will say, "I have prevailed";  
my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.  
But I trusted in Your steadfast love;  
my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation.  
I will sing to the LORD, because You have dealt bountifully with me.



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*Adapted from an evening prayer  
in the Anglican Book of Common  
Prayer. Music by Scott Arany and  
Nathan French. ©2010.*

## HYMN — I WILL REST IN YOU

**CHORUS:** *I will rest in You, O Lord, my God  
I will rest in You alone.  
I will rest in You, O Lord, my God  
I will rest in You alone.*

**VERSE:** For You are a shield around me,  
For You are my sovereign Lord!  
For You are my strong defender,  
On You I call,  
And when I fall...

**BRIDGE:** To You, O Lord,  
I commend my spirit,  
You redeem me, God of truth.  
O keep me, Lord, as the apple of Your eye.  
Lord, have mercy.  
Christ, have mercy.  
Lord, have mercy!

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*We are the voice of our city.  
Without our voices and God's  
light, our city would remain silent  
and dark. Ephrem wrote many  
hymns and prayers in the voice  
of his city Nisibis. He is in part  
remembered for his prayerful  
intercession when the city faced  
crisis. Like Ephrem, we lend our  
voices to our city tonight.*

*The incipit (opening call) is an  
adaption of an Orthodox vespers  
dismissal hymn to Ephrem.*

*"O Lord, Hear My Prayer" is a  
traditional Taizé chant.*

*The Kyrie is a traditional sung  
prayer of intercession. Music by  
Scott Arany.*

## VOICE OF THE CITY — PART I

Members of this congregation along with urban missional servants have been asked to prepare prayers in the voice of the city. These prayers come from their lives and missional presence within the city. As each person prays, they are giving voice to the cries and praises of this city.

**Leader:** *Like Ephrem, who with his streams of tears cultivated the barrenness of the desert; and by his sighing from the depths, he bore fruit a hundredfold in labours; and being a light, shone with miracles upon the world—like Ephrem our righteous teacher tonight, let us intercede with Christ God that the souls within this city might be saved.*

**We all sing:** **O Lord, hear my prayer! O Lord, hear my prayer!  
When I call answer me.**

**O Lord, hear my prayer! O Lord, hear my prayer!  
Come and listen to me.**

The intercessors will now pray.

After each prayer we all sing the Kyrie:

**Lord, have mercy! Christ, have mercy! Lord, have mercy on us.**



## DWELLING IN SCRIPTURE — REVELATION 21

*Dwelling in scripture is a spiritual discipline developed from the traditional practice of lectio divina, or “holy reading”.*

*As the passage is read twice, listen to the words that you hear. Notice if some of them catch your attention more than others. Rest there for a while.*

*After a few moments of silence resting with the text, we will move into groups of 4 or 5. Share what caught your attention in the passage.*

*Several questions for discussion are provided to help your group connect this scripture and tonight’s prayers with our shared urban experiences.*

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. [...] I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. As you hear this passage read aloud, where do you notice your heart pausing? What catches your attention?
2. With what you have heard from the intercessors tonight, how does this passage reveal good news to our city?
3. Of all the beautiful statements and promises in this passage, which one do you feel Los Angeles needs the most? Why?
4. How can you help live this passage in your life, your neighbourhood, and your city?



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*This is St. Ephrem's Fourth  
Nisibene Hymn.*

## THE VOICE OF THE CITY — PART II

O my God,  
Without ceasing I step over the threshold of Your house;  
Though I have oft forsaken Your grace,  
I will ask with boldness  
So that I might receive with confidence.

**Refrain: Lord, hear our prayer.**

O my Grace,  
Healer of all, You have visited me in my sickness!  
Payment for Your medicines, I cannot give You,  
for they are priceless.

O my Healer,  
Your mercies in richness surpass Your medicines:  
They cannot be bought, they are given freely.  
To barter Your mercy would only bring tears.

O my Master,  
How can a desolate city,  
whose council chambers remain silent while her enemy shouts,  
stand firm without aid of mercy?

O my Mercy,  
You are at all times a harbour and refuge.  
When the seas covered me, Your mercy descended and drew me out.  
Again let Your help lay hold on me!

O my Refuge,  
Apply to my afflictions  
the medicine of Your salvation,  
and the passion of Your help!  
Your sign can become a medicine to heal all.

O my Passion,  
I am greatly oppressed,  
and I lodge a formal complaint against those who trouble me.  
Let Thy mercy, my Lord, take the bitterness  
from the cup that my sins have mixed.

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*“Council chambers” – the  
original word is “king”, translated  
instead as “council chambers.”  
The concept of a king is almost  
meaningless in our Western urban  
experience, while the power to  
change law and policy towards  
justice or injustice lay now in City  
Hall and its council chambers.*



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**“Christ stands united” –**

*Ephrem’s spirituality came from a very ascetic tradition, a form of discipleship, imitating “the poor, homeless and celibate Jesus.” Ephrem would’ve described Christ’s nature as ihidaya, meaning one, only one, unique, and united. His writings speak of Christ as single in heart, unmarried, and the Only-Begotten. For Ephrem to call someone “divided” is to consider them as false and un-Christlike.*

*R. Murray, “The Features of the Earliest Christian Asceticism,” in Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honour of Gordon Rupp, ed. P. Brooks (London 1975), p. 66.*

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**“Landlords” –** *The original word here was “husband-men”, now a very archaic phrase. A husbandman was a “master of the house,” the person in charge of property and living situations. Today many urban dwellers live in rental apartments, some at the mercy of unjust landlords.*

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*A “collect” is the concluding prayer that gathers—collects—all the prayers that the congregation has just prayed.*

O my Judge,  
I look on all sides, and weep that I am desolate.  
Though many claim to be my advocates and my deliverers,  
They remain divided.  
Only Christ stands united as my Deliverer.

O my Deliverer,  
My young minds have fled, O Lord, and gone forth,  
and are like chickens pursued by the hawk;  
lo! they hide in a secret place:  
may Your peace bring them back!

O my Peace,  
The sound of my grape-gatherers, lo!  
my ears miss it, for their voices fail.  
Let it resound with the glad tidings,  
O Blessed One of Thy salvation!

O my Salvation,  
A voice of terror I have heard in my streets;  
My defenders cry while they guard my walls.  
Calm this fear with the voice of peace!

O my Voice,  
The noise of my landlords  
shall speak peace without my walls:  
the shouting of my dwellers shall speak peace within my walls,  
that I may give peace without and within.

O my Lord,  
The Church and her servants,  
the city and its dwellers,  
shall give praise for Thy salvation;  
Be the voice of peace, O Lord, the reward of our voices!

**Refrain: Lord, hear our prayer.**

## COLLECT — THE LORD’S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil  
For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever!  
Amen.





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*After our prayers and intercessions, we proclaim the promise of God's grace. Even in the night time hours there is glory and salvation.*

*Adapted from the second Nisibene Hymn by St. Ephrem. Music by Scott Arany.*

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*Luke 2:29-32. This is the prayer of Simeon, an old man who waited his entire life for the Messiah. He spoke these words upon holding the infant Christ in his arms. It is the standard dismissal prayer in the vespers of many Christian traditions.*

*Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann wrote, "Vespers is the recognition that the evening of this world has come which announces the day that has no evening. In this world every day faces night; the world itself is facing night. It cannot last forever. Yet the Church is affirming that an evening is not only an end, but also a beginning, just as any evening is also the beginning of another day. In Christ and through Christ it may become the beginning of a new life, of the day that has no evening. For our eyes have seen salvation and a light which will never fail." As we leave, let us take this light of Christ into our city.*

\*A. Schmemmann, For the Life of the World, (St. Vladimir's : New York, 1973), p. 63.

## GLORIA — GLORY BE TO YOUR GRACE

**CHORUS:** *Glory be to Your grace!*

**VERSE 1:** He saved us without a wall,  
He taught us He is our wall,  
He saved us without a king,  
Making known that He is our King.

**VERSE 2:** He saved us all from all,  
He showed us He is our all,  
He saved us by His grace,  
Revealing gracious life.

## DISMISSAL — THE SONG OF SIMEON

Lord,  
You now have set your servant free  
to go in peace as you have promised;  
For these eyes of mine have seen the Savior,  
whom you have prepared for all the world to see:  
A Light to enlighten the nations,  
and the glory of your people Israel.

Glory be to the Father,  
and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Spirit:  
as it was in the beginning, is now,  
and ever more shall be world without end,  
Alleluia, amen.



