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## *Advent: A Holy and a Broken Hallelujah to You*

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,  
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Alan Light has written a book about my hero, Leonard Cohen, titled *The Holy or the Broken: Leonard Cohen, Jeff Buckley, and the Unlikely Ascent of "Hallelujah."* Actually, the book is really about how the song "Hallelujah" (written by Leonard Cohen) became so powerful.

I have yet to read the book, but I will. In one way, I don't need to read it, because I already know the song. The song is said to have been undiscovered until Jeff Buckley resurrected it; but I, and many other Leonard Cohen fans, sure knew it. We have heard Cohen himself sing it in different ways. He is said to have written some 80 verses of the song before deciding on the four that occur in his album, *Various Positions* (1985); he has sung others since. And whatever the number of verses, one of those verses will always be:

*There's a blaze of light  
In every word  
It doesn't matter which you heard  
The holy or the broken Hallelujah!*

Advent, and even Christmas, can be times for brokenness. Broken toys, for instance. There will be some broken toys this Christmastide, startling introductions for children to the way the rest of their lives will be.

Broken promises. Maybe it was a gift that you were promised last year. Maybe it was something you promised several months ago that you just cannot fulfill now. Broken plans. One family member wanted to visit one in-law, but the other family member had another in-law in mind. Maybe some illness prevented the perfect plan. "My water has broken," she said. That means a birth is coming, doesn't it? Advent is, indeed, about a birth coming, but something has to break first.

The season itself is broken, isn't it? We don't know whether we are supposed to be still lingering over Thanksgiving, or being joyful, or refraining from singing Christmas carols because it's not really Christmas yet. Are we supposed to be happy now, or preparing for something else? We don't know.

Well, in the midst of whatever has broken this December, let me assure you that something holy is here. In fact, the most holy pieces of our lives are often the most broken pieces. I mean our hearts, our lives, even our hopes and dreams. We've all lost things in our life's journey. I believe that what makes a place holy is that we have lost something there; we have given up something. What makes a life holy is that it knows how to lose things. One reason graveyards are holy is because they represent lost lives. Churches are holy because we give up things there; I hope we give up our lives there.

The Hallelujah that emerges from brokenness is a holy Hallelujah; it is a genuine Hallelujah. That's why the Book of Psalms is so full of Hallelujahs; those psalms are as much about sadness and loss as they are about hope and victory. They are holy.



So, don't be afraid if something breaks this Advent, or even if you break something. That brokenness can be an occasion for holiness. It can be an occasion to sing Hallelujah. When Jesus came into the world so long ago, the world itself was overturned. Mary said "God has cast down the mighty from their thrones and lifted up the lowly." In fact, the power of sin was broken. The power of death was broken, simply in that miraculous birth. In the end, brokenness is the real reason we sing Hallelujah: the brokenness between God and humanity is healed! The division is made one. God is made flesh in Jesus Christ our Lord. Hallelujah!

Sam Candler signature



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