

# Feast of Middle-earth

To read the following liturgy responsively, a host will read the green-shaded text. Others read together, in unison, the grey-shaded quotations from Tolkien's works. Include words in (parentheses); omit words in [brackets]. (20 mins.) Alternatively, read the prayer and leave the quotations unspoken for future reference. (3 mins.) Quotations not from *The Lord of the Rings* or *Hobbit* are from the following: *S* = *The Silmarillion*; *Letter* = *Letters of Tolkien*; *OFS* = "On Fairy Stories"; *MR* = *Morgoth's Ring*

Host **Welcome to the feast of Middle-earth! Let us be glad that our paths have brought us here and now to this place together.**

1. Bilbo "used often to say there was only one Road; that it was like a great river: its springs at every doorstep, and every path was its tributary. 'It's a dangerous business,' Frodo, going out of your door... 'You step into the Road, and if you don't keep your feet, there is no knowing where you might be swept off to.'"

Host **We thank God for each of you, and for the families and circles of friendship you represent. Tonight we are a fellowship, by God's grace, of free peoples from Middle-earth and beyond.**

2. "And I will choose companions to go with you, as far as they will or fortune allows."

Host **We are gathered to remember, to reflect upon, and to renew our appreciation for J.R.R. Tolkien and his imaginative art, which refracts the light of the good news of Christ, the *evangelium*.**

3. [Bilbo at Rivendell:] "If you want to know I am just writing an ending for (my book). I had thought of putting: *and he lived happily ever afterwards to the end of his days.*"  
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4. The gospel "story is supreme; and it is true. Art has been verified. God is the Lord, of angels, and of men – and of elves... But in God's kingdom the presence of the greatest does not depress the small. Redeemed Man is still man. Story, fantasy, still go on, and should go on. The *Evangelium* has not abrogated legends; it has hallowed them, especially the 'happy ending.' The Christian has still to work, with mind as well as body, to suffer, hope and die; but he may now perceive that all his bents and faculties have a purpose, which can be redeemed. So great is the bounty with which he has been treated that he may now, perhaps, fairly dare to guess that in Fantasy he may actually assist in the effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation." [OFS]

Host **Dear Father, we thank you that Tolkien's fantasies lead us not in an escape from reality, but rather take us deeper into the truth of our real world, awakening glimpses of joy by overcoming "the drab blur of triteness or familiarity."**

5. Only through fantasy are we able to discern the sheer originality and queerness of ordinary things, the surprising strangeness of "stone, and wood, and iron; tree and grass; house and fire; bread and wine." [Wood p. 7, citing *OFS*]  
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6. "It is the mark of a good fairy-story... that however wild its events, however fantastic or terrible the adventures, it can give to the child or man that hears it, when the 'turn' comes, a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears, as keen as that given by any form of literary art,

and having a peculiar quality.... In such stories when the sudden 'turn' comes we get a piercing glimpse of joy, and heart's desire, that for a moment passes outside the frame, rends indeed the very web of story, and lets a gleam come through." [OFS]

**Host Dear Father, we pray that Tolkien's writings will bring us refreshment and healing, awaken our desire for your beauty, and reveal the hidden ways of God in this world.**

7. "I feel as if an ever darkening sky over our present world had been suddenly pierced, the clouds rolled back, and an almost forgotten sunlight had poured down again. As if indeed the horns of Hope had been heard again...." [Letter 328]

**Host Dear Father, give us ears to hear and eyes to see the "joy beyond the walls of the world" [OFS]:**

8. "The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man's history. This story begins and ends in joy. It has pre-eminently the inner consistency of reality. This story is supreme, and it has entered history. It is pre-eminently (and infinitely, if our capacity were not finite) high and joyous. There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true, and none which so many sceptical men have accepted as true on its own merits. To reject it leads either to sadness or to wrath." [OFS]

**Host Dear Father, give us ears to hear your song, the source of all making, the music of a good creation.**

9. "There was Eru, the One, who in Arda [the world] is called Ilúvatar; and he made first the Ainur, the Holy Ones, that were the offspring of his thought, and they were with him before aught else was made. And he spoke to them, propounding to them themes of music; and they sang before him, and he was glad." [S]
10. "'Eä! Let these things Be! And I will send forth into the Void the Flame Imperishable, and it shall be at the heart of the World, and the World shall Be; and those of you that will may go down into it.' And suddenly the Ainur saw afar off a light, as it were a cloud with a living heart of flame." [S]

**Host Dear Father, though we are far from home, let us know that your Light and music and Life are with us, and will bring us home to everlasting joy:**

11. "I will not say: do not weep; for not all tears are an evil."
12. Ilúvatar "willed that the hearts of Men should seek beyond the world and should find no rest therein." [Letter 212]
13. "If we are indeed the Eruhin, the Children of the One, then He will not [allow] Himself to be deprived of His own, not by any Enemy, not even by ourselves. This is the last foundation of Estel [hope], which we keep even when we contemplate the End: of all His designs, the issue must be for His Children's joy." [MR]

**Host Dear Father, help us understand Tolkien's wish that each of us would gain "the heart of a child" to know you, that the purpose of life is to praise you with all created things...**

14. "to increase according to our capacity our knowledge of God by all the means we have, and to be moved by it to praise and thanks.... We praise you, we call you holy, we worship you, we proclaim your glory, we thank you for the greatness of your

splendour.... And in moments of exaltation we may call on all created things to join in our chorus, speaking on their behalf.... Praise the Lord, all mountains and hills, all orchards and forests, all things that creep and birds on the wing.” [Letter 310]

**Host Dear Father, give us wisdom like Aragorn to act not for fame and glory, but for the sake of others.**

15. “All that is gold does not glitter,  
Not all those who wander are lost;  
The old that is strong does not wither,  
Deep roots are not reached by the frost.”

**Host Dear Father, give us wisdom like Aragorn.**

16. “The world is all grown strange (declared Eomer).... How shall a man judge what to do in such times?”  
“As he ever has judged,” said Aragorn. “Good and ill have not changed since yester-year; nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another among Men. It is a man’s part to discern them, as much in the Golden Wood as in his own house.”

**Host Dear Father, help us act with courage when we are confronted by evil. Like Galadriel, may we relinquish power over others, and accept a role of suffering for the sake of others.**

17. “Yet if you succeed, then our power is diminished, and Lothlorien will fade, and the tides of Time will sweep it away. We must depart into the West, or dwindle to a rustic folk of dell and cave, slowly to forget and to be forgotten.”  
Frodo bent his head. “And what do you wish?” he said at last.  
“That what should be shall be,” she answered. “The love of the Elves for their land and their works is deeper than the deep of the Sea, and their regret is undying and cannot ever wholly be assuaged. Yet they will cast all away rather than submit to Sauron.”

**Host Dear Father, so long as we may dwell in a peaceful Shire, by your mercy keep us from complacency and stir us to remember to give thanks.**

18. “There in that pleasant corner of the world they plied their well-ordered business of living, and they heeded less and less the world outside where dark things moved, until they came to think that peace and plenty were the rule in Middle-earth and the right of all sensible folk. They forgot or ignored what little they had ever known of the Guardians, and of the labours of those that made possible the long peace of the Shire. They were, in fact, sheltered, but they had ceased to remember it.”

**Host Dear Father, let us never seek justice without mercy, but remember that in a triumph of mercy...**

19. “God himself, working through the love and freedom of his creatures, using even our mistakes and the designs of the Enemy,” brings about our good. [Tolkien, quoted by Caldecott]

**Host** Dear Father, teach us the heroism of the little ones, open our eyes to see the “enoblement, or sanctification, of the humble” [Letter 181]. Make us more like Sam Gamgee, the gardener and chief hero of *The Lord of the Rings* [Letter 131].

20. “In that hour of trial it was the love of his master that helped most to hold him firm; but also deep down in him lived still unconquered his plain hobbit-sense: he knew in the core of his heart that he was not large enough to bear such a burden, even if such visions were not a mere cheat to betray him. The one small garden of a free gardener was all his need and due, not a garden swollen to a realm; his own hands to use, not the hands of others to command.”
21. “For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength” [1 Co 1:25].

**Host** Dear Father, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Though the world regard us as fools, help us relinquish all coercive power over others, choose rather to die than to use the ring.

22. “No!” cried Gandalf, springing to his feet. “With that power I should have power too great and terrible. And over me the Ring would gain a power still greater and more deadly.” His eyes flashed and his face was lit as by a fire within. “Do not tempt me. For I do not wish to become like the Dark Lord himself... Do not tempt me! I dare not take it, not even to keep it safe, unused. The wish to wield it would be too great for my strength.”

**Host** Dear Father, deliver us from the pursuit of power and the arrogance of despair.

23. “Despair, or folly” said Gandalf, (to give up the Ring)? “It is not despair, for despair is only for those who see the end beyond all doubt. We do not. It is wisdom to recognize necessity when all other courses have been weighed, though as folly it may appear to those who cling to false hope. Well, let folly be our cloak, a veil before the eyes of the Enemy. For (Sauron) is very wise, and weighs all things to a nicety in the scales of his malice. But the only measure that he knows is desire, desire for power... Into his heart the thought will not enter that any will refuse it, that having the Ring we may seek to destroy it. If we seek this we shall put him out of reckoning.”

**Host** Dear Father, awaken our faith like Abraham, who set out from his country and kindred to go to a land he did not know (Genesis 12:1). Awaken our faith like Frodo, who said:

24. “I will take the Ring, though I do not know the way.”

**Host** Dear Father, awaken our faith as the trust that forms friendship.

25. “I must admit,” (Aragorn) added with a queer laugh, “that I hoped you would take me for my own sake. A hunted man sometimes wearies of distrust and longs for friendship. But there, I believe my looks are against me.”  
[Frodo:] “I think one of (Sauron’s) spies would – well, seem fairer and feel fouler, if you understand.”
26. “You can trust us to stick with you through thick and thin – to the bitter end. And you can trust us to keep any secret of yours – closer than you keep it yourself. But

you cannot trust us to let you face trouble alone, and go off without a word. We are your friends, Frodo.”

**Host Dear Father, as Sam found words to sing in the darkness of Cirith Ungol, so teach us through songs and storytelling never to forget the hope that lies before us.**

27. “In western lands beneath the Sun the flowers may rise in Spring, the trees may bud, the waters run, the merry finches sing. Or there maybe ’tis cloudless night and swaying beeches bear the Elven-stars as jewels white amid their branching hair.”

**Host Dear Father, awaken our hope that right will prevail in a future that is permanently good, that light defines the darkness, and that life triumphs over death beyond the walls of the world.**

28. “There, peeping among the cloud-wrack above a dark tower high up in the mountains, Sam saw a white star twinkle for a while. The beauty of it smote his heart, as he looked up out of that forsaken land, and hope returned to him. For like a shaft, clear and cold, the thought pierced him that in the end the Shadow was only a small and passing thing: there was light and high beauty for ever beyond its reach. . . . Now, for a moment, his own fate, even his master’s, ceased to trouble him ... and putting away all fear he cast himself into a deep and untroubled sleep.”

**Host Dear Father, awaken our hope.**

29. “We knew that in our beginning we had been *born never to die*. And by that, my lord, we meant: *born to life everlasting, without any shadow of any end*.” [Andreth, the wise woman, in MR, 314.]
30. ““They say,” answered Andreth, ‘they say that the One will himself enter into Arda, and heal Men and all the Marring from the beginning to the end.’” [MR, 321.]

**Host Dear Father, awaken our love for others in grace and forgiveness.**

31. “No, Sam!” said Frodo. . . . “He is fallen, and his cure is beyond us; but I would still spare him, in the hope that he may find it.”
32. “the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many...” (LOTR, vol. 1)
33. “the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many...” (LOTR, vol. 2)
34. “the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many...” (LOTR, vol. 3)<sup>1</sup>

**Host Dear Father, awaken in us a love that proves greater than suffering:**

35. “The world is indeed full of peril and in it there are many dark places. But still there is much that is fair. And though in all lands, love is now mingled with grief, it still grows, perhaps, the greater.”

**Host Dear Father, as sojourners and aliens in the land, give us the mercy of showing hospitality, that characteristic expression “of justice in Middle-earth, since the free giving and receiving of gifts ensures that no one seeks merely his own good” (Wood, p. 90). Dear Father, bless this meal we eat together and the communion of persons we enjoy tonight.**

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<sup>1</sup> Wood, p. 150: “The pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many’ is the only declaration to be repeated in all three volumes of *The Lord of the Rings*.”

36. “When every guest had been welcomed and was finally inside the gate, there were songs, dances, music, games, and, of course, food and drink. There were three official meals: lunch, tea and dinner (or supper). But lunch and tea were marked chiefly by the fact that at those times all the guests were sitting down and eating together. At other times there were merely lots of people eating and drinking – continuously from elevenses until six-thirty, when the fireworks started.”

Host And so, in the care of the One who made all things with a song and sees every end from before its beginning, who joins with us on the way and invites us to respond with thanksgiving, we begin again tonight to walk our little road in hope:

37. The Road goes ever on and on  
Down from the door where it began.  
Now far ahead the Road has gone,  
And I must follow, if I can.  
Pursuing it with eager feet,  
Until it joins some larger way,  
Where many paths and errands meet.  
And whither then? I cannot say.

[All:] *Amen.*

Host Let the festivities begin!

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Later tonight, in Rivendell Library, browse at your pleasure, research at will, meet up with friends. Some discussions likely to be overheard there include:

- Which of the quotes above do you recognize or remember?
- What are your favorite Tolkien quotes?
- Which of your favorite quotes fit well with the themes above?
- Which of Tolkien’s books do you want to read next?
- If you could meet Tolkien here and now today, what would you most like to ask him?

In Rivendell Library you will find many books written by J.R.R. Tolkien (some edited by his son Christopher). There are beautiful, large format, illustrated books about Tolkien’s works, art and family. Two smaller books that are not yet reshelved are Ralph Wood, *The Gospel According to Tolkien* (WJK, 2003), and Stratford Caldecott, *Secret Fire: The Spiritual Vision of J.R.R. Tolkien* (DLT, 2003), both of which were used to prepare this liturgy.