

This photo is available in
the print version of *Singing Our Lives*.

Surrounded by adoring men, women, and children playing folk musical instruments and clapping, and an inner circle of angels with their flaming crimson wings flowing outward from their throats, the Lord Jesus Christ appears ready to clap his hands.

Laura James. PSALM 100, 2004. Acrylic on canvas, 24" x 25 1/2". Used by permission of the artist.

Make a Joyful Noise

BY HEIDI J. HORNICK

In this delightful interpretation of Psalm 100 by Laura James, the people wear brightly colored everyday clothing and sit in a similar cross-legged position. They huddle around the Christ like sheep about their shepherd, rejoicing in the Lord's presence as they look to him for guidance. Christ's mouth is open as he prays for the people or sings to them.

The artist, who grew up and lives in Brooklyn, NY, is a self-taught painter of Antiguan heritage. Ms. James was brought up in the Brethren denomination, yet she draws inspiration from the iconography found in Ethiopian Christian art, which relies on pattern and repetition of shape to convey its message. When some Rastafarian friends introduced her to Ethiopian culture in 1991, she was impressed by the facts that Ethiopia had never been colonized and had been a Christian country since the fourth century. *Psalm 100* incorporates some of the Ethiopian style and themes that she has researched. The portrayal of a nonwhite Christ, for example, is an attractive feature of Ethiopian art for her.

Laura James' paintings and woodcuts have been praised for their multicultural approach and beauty. She has the wonderful ability to invite people of every community to enter the biblical stories, encounter the Church's saints, and see themselves in God's image. Numerous exhibitions of her work have been well received, particularly in the Roman Catholic communities of Harlem, NY, and Chicago.

Ms. James came to love the stories of the Bible and studied photography in high school. In her painting, she depicts the biblical narratives with the realism of daily life associated with photography. She has been influenced by contemporary Black culture as well as by the Ethiopian art, history, and culture that she has studied. These have profoundly impacted her understanding of Black history and the foundation of Christianity.[†]

Her work appears in many books, from the pages of the *Oxford Illustrated History of the Bible* ("Jesus Walks on Water") to the cover of David G. Myers' popular textbook, *Exploring Psychology, sixth edition* ("People Waiting in the Sun"). Other paintings can be seen on her website, www.laura-jamesart.com.

NOTE

[†] Donna Thompson Ray, "Contemporary Images, Ancient Traditions: The Art of Laura James," online at www.laurajamesart.com/bio.htm (accessed 11 November 2005).