

2024 ADVENT DEVOTIONS



**Do You Hear
What I Hear?**

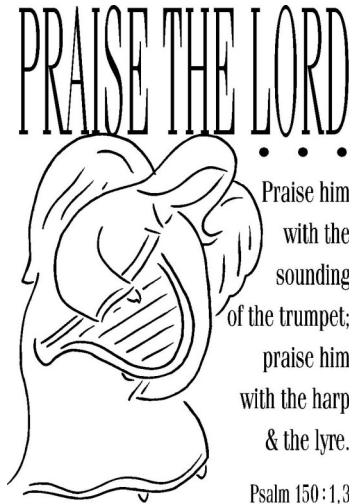
Welcome to the 29th edition of the Bethel Advent Devotional – written by Bethel people to praise and honor the coming of Jesus Christ!

This year’s devotions are based on Christmas songs. Martin Luther said, “Music is the art of the prophets and the gift of God.” Our theme is “Do You Hear What I Hear?” In addition to being the name of a well-loved Christmas song, this theme reminds us that we need to be always listening to God in our lives!

Christmas songs have a number of functions in the church and in our lives:

- ❖ Honor – we sing to honor the coming of Jesus and that He is the Incarnate God!
- ❖ Worship – we sing our praise, wonder, and love to the newborn King Jesus!
- ❖ Community – we sing these songs together joyfully as a community of believers!
- ❖ Educate – we sing and learn of various aspects of Jesus’s coming, birth, and impact on our lives!
- ❖ Connection – we sing these songs that many of us learned in childhood, and that we connect with the time of year and our faith, church, and family!

Martin Luther also said, “As long as we live there is never enough singing.” Please enjoy learning more about these Christmas songs. Sing with joy this Advent and Christmas Season!



Song: *Angels from the Realms of Glory*

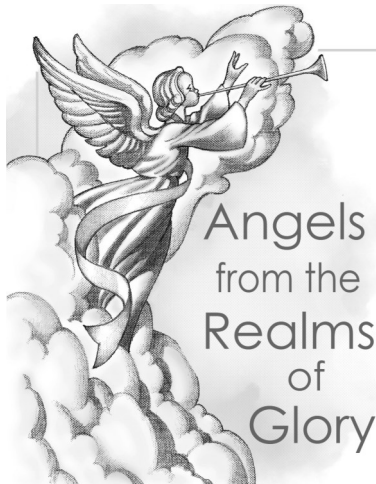
This carol was written by a Scottish poet and hymnwriter James Montgomery in 1816 and sung in Scottish churches for Christmas Eve services. The tune we sing, was developed in London at the Regent Square Church some twenty years later.

There are actually six verses pointing out the various symbols and people involved in the birth of Christ. The first verse lifts up the Angels indicating the creation of our world. The Shepherds are lifted up for coming to worship Jesus, while in the third verse Sages or Wise Men come to worship Christ. Then, both Saints and Sinners are lifted up as realizing this is the Lord and recounting that He will break our chains, and at last, the Infant comes and all bow down because Creation is restored.

What is most important about this hymn is the refrain that points to us worshipping Christ as a babe in a manger and as God the newborn King.

*Come and Worship,
Come and Worship,
Worship Christ, the newborn King.*

By Mary Jo Mikulski

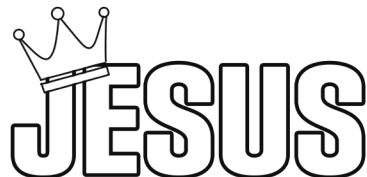


December 2

Song: *Waiting for a King*

Waiting, patience, anticipation can all be emotional words in many situations. The “when”, the “if’s”, the “will it’s” all go through our minds. We all can be impatient for things we desire whether it’s as simple as waiting in a drive-thru line or something more substantial such as a word from a loved one from the “will you marry me” or “I got the job” or “the doctor said....” In this season, we are waiting, waiting for the birth of our Savior. We know the story if we’ve been in church for even a short time, but we still wait. We wait now for the Second Coming, the Peace That Passes All Understanding that we all hear about. We wonder will Jesus come, will it be today, next week, in my life time? Will the King of kings, the Lord of Lords come? The hymn asks: Will the world be ready? Have we opened **our** hearts, **our** minds, **our** homes, **our** arms to receive Christ Jesus the King? Will we jump in **His** Arms? Much like during Lent, we need to be introspective and examine ourselves while we wait. The two seasons are indelibly intertwined — the waiting for the birth and the waiting for the exit from the tomb. The angels were present at both events. “Come See” was their first proclamation, and at the tomb they declare “He is not here, why do you seek the living among the dead?” We wait, hopefully, as a child anticipates Christmas morning. We wait with wonder, both in the awe type wonder due a Savior and at the same time as if we are waiting on the one who may have stood us up. The bridge of this hymn states with surety, with complete understanding that “In the fullness of time, the Prince of Peace **will come**, the promised Messiah, **God’s chosen One**. For those who are righteous, hope will be restored. Their eyes will be opened, eyes will be Opened, Eyes Will Be Opened (feel the excitement in this part) They will know the Lord! As we wait, as we wonder, as we ponder in this season of Advent, may ours hearts be open to receive the Good News! And equally, that we would share the Good News with others around us that their wait will be gifted with Waiting For A King!

By Kevin Hansen



Song: *I'll Be Home for Christmas*

I'll be home for Christmas, was first written by Buck Ram as a poem for his mother when he was in college in 1922. Later he collaborated with the lyricist, Kim Gannon, and composer, Walter Kent, to create the song that was released by Bing Crosby in 1943. It gave Bing Crosby his fifth Gold record and made it to number 3 on the charts that year. Over the years, it has been recorded and re-released by scores of different recording artists like Elvis Presley and Johnny Mathis; and more recently; Rascal Flatts, Josh Groban, Kelly Clarkson, Reba McEntire, and Michael Bubl  to name just a few. It is one of the best loved songs of Christmas, has been embraced by listeners for generations, and has sold millions of records around the world.

Even though there is no mention of Jesus or the first Christmas anywhere in the song it has been used in cantatas and church programs over the years because of the hopeful nature of the lyrics. During World War II, it was like a holiday prayer that was shared by those on the battlefronts as well as those at home praying for their loved one's safe return.

For me personally through the years, ***I'll be home for Christmas***, has always created memories of the Love that Christmas is.

As the song begins;

I'm dreaming tonight of a place I love, Even more than I usually do . . .

I reflect and realize how blessed I am to know the true meaning of Christmas and how that Love has guided and shaped my life. I give thanks for all the people who have helped nurture that love within me.

As we prepare for this year's season of LOVE; may we who have this wonderful Gift of knowing why we dream of Christmas with joy and anticipation, help spread that same joy to others.

By Carol Warning



December 4

Song: Adore

What is it like when you adore something? “Oh, I adore my dog - he’s such a cuddle bug!” Or maybe, “I adore shopping and can’t wait to go!” How about, “My husband adores fishing and gets out on the water every chance he gets!”

Contrast how you feel about a favorite pet or activity with what happens in our hearts when we consider that the creator of the universe left his throne in glory to come down to us. Here in our mess and frustration and distraction - not paying any attention to the presence of God with us. Squabbling between ourselves like small children when we don’t get our way.

When Graham Kendrick wrote the song “Adore” with Martin Chalk, he said that the line “O come let us adore Him” from the old hymn reminds him to sing adoration to the Lord any time of the year. Christ is the “light of the world here to save.”

Lord God, please turn our hearts to you. Help us choose you and choose to spend time with you because you love us and want to spend time with us. Help us to focus on you, love others, and adore you now and always. Let all that is within us adore You!

By Patti Ordower

Continued from page 15 (December 13)

*Dear Father in Heaven, As a baby announcement from YOU, this song does not merely share “Good News” - this shouts the **BEST NEWS** ever!!! What a clear declaration You make to us: Christmas is all about the awesome King of our universe humbling himself to miraculously be born on Earth as a human, specifically for the purpose of our salvation! We share this news about our Messiah, Jesus Christ, as we sing His resounding praise! He is our most necessary GIFT from You, Holy Father! Your only Son, Jesus, is our only hope for an abundant and eternal life! He chose to come down from Heaven as a way to exude His divine light. Our purpose for being born and living here is to let HIS LIGHT shine THROUGH US! And You don’t want us to remain quiet about that!! We Lift up our voices ... It’s Christmas!!! The King has COME!!! HALLELUJAH♥*

"It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect." ~ 2 Samuel 22:33

Merry Christmas to Everyone, Kristen Wells

Song: O Come All Ye Faithful

What a beautiful hymn! Can you imagine looking at a newborn baby boy in the humblest of surroundings and naming him KING of Kings? The faithful who had been waiting and believing that there would be a Messiah came to ADORE HIM. What faith and belief that GOD was in their midst. This hymn encourages us to believe in things unexplainable. It leads us to hope, and it teaches us how to praise the one true GOD who fulfills His promise of eternal salvation.

Bethel's Confirmation Class presented their thoughts on this beautiful hymn:

- The reason that this Christmas Carol is close to me is because it symbolizes the beginning of the first Christmas which is meaningful to me because it brings everyone together in worship. This is the time of the year that truly celebrates the best thing that ever happened!
- It reminds me of the importance of Jesus' birth and how the people of that time were waiting for him.
- I believe the song *O Come All Ye Faithful* signifies the glory of Jesus. The song mentions joy and happiness multiple times which not only makes the birth of Jesus sound joyful but also shows that Christmas season as joyful.

Beloved Messiah, we give You all our praise and thanksgiving for coming to us this Christmas. Your birth and presence in our lives is truly cause for celebration, and as our Confirmation Class has reminded us: It is YOU who brings us JOY and HAPPINESS and YOU are truly the BEST THING THAT EVER HAPPENED!

By Bethel Confirmation Class



December 6

Song: From Heaven Above

*From heaven above to earth I come
To bear good news to every home!
Glad tidings of great joy I bring
To all the world and gladly sing.*

The angel sings: “I come to bear good news to every home” - yes, the angel comes to bear the news, but Jesus comes to be the news! Verse 3: “He will Himself your Savior be, and from all sin will set you free.”

This carol sings the wonder of the truth we know: God Himself came among us here on earth to pay, Himself, the entire price of our salvation.

At Christmas time, with all the focus on the Child in the manger, we need to be reminded always that this Child is God, Immanuel, God with us. Coming to earth as a baby was God’s way of putting Himself into His creation, so that He could Himself pay the awful price, the full debt of our sinfulness. Verse 4: “The blessing that the Father planned, the Son holds in His infant hand.”

The full significance of what God has done did not really strike me until just a few years ago. I learned, in a podcast, that when we choose to forgive a wrong of any kind done to us, we at that time resolve to bear the cost ourselves, whether financial or (more difficult) emotional. We either pay the debt of money or resolve never to cause the betrayer or offender any similar hurt in any way.

This is what God has done for us. He Himself has paid the full price of our sin; He has absorbed the cost. Verse 8: "You turned not from our needs away; how can our thanks such love repay?"

So to anyone you know who may have doubts about the Christian faith, counsel them with love, never to give up on listening and searching for reasons to believe, or for encouraging the belief they already have.

*Heavenly Father,
Thank you for the tremendous love You have for us, Your
creation, that brought You, Yourself, to pay the price for our sin
and rebellion, our self-centeredness. Open the hearts of those who
do not yet see or acknowledge what you have done. May the
Child in the manger glow with new significance bringing
renewed hope to everyone. In Jesus' name we ask.*

By Trudy Kussow

Song: *Glory in the Highest*

*Born to die and born to save
Born to take our sin away.*

There is a part in *The Chosen* tv series that sticks with me particularly. I realize that *The Chosen* writers have “filled in the gaps” where the Bible is silent. However, I can easily believe this scene. Early in Jesus’ ministry, he is entering the gates of Jerusalem. Just outside the gates is where the Romans crucified people in order to obtain the maximum terrorizing effect. Jesus glances up at the men on crosses and quickly looks down. His brow furrows, and he takes a deep breath. You know from that scene and from Scripture that he knows his fate. It’s a sight that he almost can’t bear to see, but he walks on with determination. A two-second clip states so much. When we can easily say, “He was crucified for my sins,” we sometimes lose the impact of the knowledge that Jesus foreknew the tremendous suffering that awaited him.

“Light and life to all He brings The newborn King”

This hymn ends, however, with the glorious promise of his future kingdom. He is “The newborn King.” Through his death and Resurrection, we have the assurance of forgiveness, a place prepared for us, a life eternal, new bodies, a redeemed and restored creation, a true community of worshippers, a place of peace with no sorrow, and the unimaginable loving presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Thank you, Lord, that you willingly gave your life for us. Help us to realize the sacrifice as we await the full arrival of your kingdom.

By Carol Jacobs

Glory TO THE
NEWBORN
King

Song: *Away in a Manger*

Away in a Manger was always one of my favorite Christmas songs, maybe because I knew every word. My family went caroling around our neighborhood when I was growing up. Singing was so important in our family, and we truly wished to deliver a performance that would bring joy to the homes we sang for at Christmas time.

When I was young, though, I don't expect I ever thought much beyond its lullaby quality. If that is all that I ever knew, perhaps that would have been enough. Jesus in his innocence as a new born was endearing and somehow a comfort to me believing that Jesus could and would keep me safe through the night.

But there, of course, is more to understand now that I am an adult. My relationship with Jesus now becomes a little more complicated as my life becomes more complicated. Or so I convince myself...

No...

This song reminds me why Jesus told us to have the faith of little children.

The faith that Jesus, who was born into the world for me, was celebrated in heaven and on earth.

The faith that even the stars and the cattle responded to the magnificent miracle of his birth.

The faith and desire to give my heart to Him without reservation and declare "I love you, Lord Jesus".

The faith that believes Jesus will protect me through the scary, dark-filled night or whatever he calls me to do.

And the faith that He will make a place for me in heaven when he calls me home.



By Lynn Zook

Song: I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day

Although the familiar Christmas carol, "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day," lyrics were born out of painful circumstances—the story behind it drives home the message of Hope and the power of God's marvelous plan of redemption for each one of us.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote the Christmas carol originally as a poem in 1863. (Which was later put to music). The lyrics were born of the mockery he felt when the bells rang on that Christmas Day in 1863. The bells rang out to symbolize peace. Hope. Love. Longfellow felt the bells ringing mocked the optimism of the Christmas message beside his own grief and loss. Longfellow had lost his wife and the mother of their 6 children in a fire in 1862. The despair he felt over her death compounded by the news that his oldest son, serving in the Civil War, had been paralyzed. (Later the paralysis was lifted; however, the son remained maimed the rest of his life).

Even today, we can emphasize at times with Longfellow's despair over life's problems and trials. We see the mockery being made of God, His Word. We hear of the senseless wars, violence, murders all around the world leaving us to wander at times, "where is God in all of this?"

As disciples of Christ, we can, like Longfellow, find a hope and a peace, a settledness in the midst of bleak despair. How? Knowing God reigns. And He reigns Supreme. He is in control of all things, all the time. He is never blindsided by life's happenings. Not death, not financial failure, a child's waywardness, a spouses adultery. No, our God knows. He knows our pain, our suffering no matter which way it comes.

So take a moment this Blessed Christmas season to reflect on The Peace Almighty God offers to us through our Savior Jesus Christ and The Holy Spirit. Like Longfellow, we, too, can sing,

Do you hear the bells, they're ringing? (Peace on Earth)
The light, the angels singing (Peace on Earth)
Open up your heart and hear them (Peace on Earth)
Peace on Earth, good will to men.

John 14:27, Isaiah 2:63 I peter 5:7 Psalms 4:8 Psalms 34:14 Romans 15:13

By Mary Creese

December 10

Song: *Love Came Down at Christmas*

Christina Rossetti wrote *Love Came Down at Christmas* as a poem in her diary in December of 1885, based on the Bible verses from 1 John 4:7-11. In this passage, we see the word “love” mentioned 11 times. Christina follows suit using the word 12 times (not counting the repeating of the chorus). Through the song, she explains what love is, divine and incarnate as well as a plea, gift and sign, who love is, God, and who it is for, all men.

During this Christmas Season, I urge you to embrace the hustle and bustle as these are times where we see God’s love shining all around us. We see it through our Advent preparation when we hear about the coming of our Savior, and we see it in our community; people standing in the cold ringing bells and collecting money for the less fortunate, food/toy drives, Operation Christmas Child and the list could go on. All of these are signs of love, and as 1 John tells us, God is love and his love is the “reason for the season.” Sometimes, we tell others or think to ourselves to remember the reason for the season, but perhaps we should take it a step further and explain what that is. “Love shall be our token, Love be yours and love be mine, Love to God and all men, Love for plea and gift and sign”.

As we hear adages like “hustle and bustle” and “reason for the season” let this be a reminder to take a moment to reflect on the gift that was given to us all, Love. For God is love and love comes from God. He loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. Merry Christmas!

Thank you,
Jamie Wilkinson



Song: C-H-R-I-S-T-M-A-S (C is for Christ Child)

C-H-R-I-S-T-M-A-S

The first time we heard this song was during a Saturday night Bethel service.

The song was written by Eddy Arnold & Jenny Lou Carson in 1949.

Eddy Arnold's version:

When I was but a youngster Christmas meant one thing
That I'd be getting lots of toys that day
I learned a whole lot different when mother set me down
And taught me to spell Christmas this way

C – is for the Christ Child born upon this day

H – is for Herald Angels in the night

R – means our Redeemer

I – means Israel

S – is for the star that shone so bright

T – is for three wise men they who travelled far

M – is for the manger where He lay

A – for all He stands for

S – means shepherds came

And that's why there's a Christmas Day

Our version:

C – is for the CHRIST CHILD born upon this day

H – is for the HOPE a newborn baby brought to the world to guide our future

R – is for the RICHES we all share...faith, family, love, blessings and friendships.

I – is for ILLUMINATE...the lighting of our luminaries on Christmas Eve with family.

S – is for the STAR OF BETHELHEM...representing hope and a guiding light.

T – is for TRADITIONS...the nativity, Advent candles, Christmas carols, family baking days

M – is for MARY the mother of Christ...so young...so full of faith.

A – is for ANGELS...the angels here on earth and those who watch over us from heaven above.

S – is for Singing traditional seasonal songs. Our favorite is *Silent Night* on Christmas Eve.

And that's why there's a Christmas Day

What words would your family use to describe Christmas?

By Mark & Janet Guyer

December 12



Song: Follow the Light

This song is a favorite of the Praise Team. It's a little mix of Advent and Christmas references. The words of the song say it best:

“Star in the sky we behold you, how could our eyes turn away
Drawn to the *light of mercy*, that comes to *make a way*.

A *lamp* for our path that was darkness, eternity's secret revealed

A *hope* to illumine these shadows, a *love now born to heal*.

(chorus) **And we will follow the Light,
We will follow the Light,
Seeking the Lamb,
Our saving Love Divine.**

Even the night will not shake us, in the desert our hearts will not fear

Drawn to the *hope of salvation*, we wait for the sun (*Son [sp]*) to appear.

(chorus)
(bridge -)

O Star of wonder, star of night, star with royal beauty bright

Westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to thy Perfect Light.

(chorus – end)

During Advent, we Christians are in a state of waiting, watching. To me, these words guide my hopeful **waiting** and **watching**. Jesus is our light of mercy, a love born to heal, a lamp and hope to brighten the darkness. If we **follow His light**, we've got all we need, both here on earth and later in Heaven. Yay, Jesus!!! Thank you, Jesus!!!

Thank you, Lord, for your most wonderful gift to us!! Thank you for loving us so much that you shared your Son with us and provided the Light we need to hope and wait for His return to take us to live with You. We pray in Jesus precious name, Amen.

By Suzy Patterson - with love and awe for our Lord

Song: Born is the King — It's Christmas

By Hillsong Worship from Christmas album "We Have a Savior"
(written by Scott Ligertwood and Matt Crocker - Released in November 2011)

Today's Christmas song is obviously a contemporary one. Hailing from Australia, the Hillsong Worship team has quickly become well-known in the Christian music arena. They have written and produced a full library of modern worship music. This one has become a favorite for our Bethel Praise Team to lead the congregation in singing. From the opening "Do do do do do do's", rejoicing all the way through, its playful, bouncy tempo and catchy tune bring a divine joyfulness to the sanctuary! Even though it's not a traditional "oldie" that has (yet) been passed down to many generations, it has already become a highly requested one to sing by younger kids and adults alike. Children especially enjoy singing, which makes the song even more loved, as we pray families of all ages will worship together!

Even Peter Swartz, a Christian school music teacher, was moved by this song after he found it for his students to sing, "The lyrics for this particular song are simple, yet profound. They remind us of the true meaning of Christmas - that it's not just about exchanging gifts or indulging in delicious food, but it is a time to celebrate the greatest gift of all – the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ...It is a call to bring unity and compassion to a world that often feels divided. The beauty of this song lies in the way it brings everyone together in worship and celebration. I have witnessed firsthand how this song unites my students during our Christmas concerts. It has become a tradition for us to sing this song as a finale, with everyone joining their voices in harmony. The joy and enthusiasm in their faces as they sing with all their hearts is a sight to behold!"

Our own boys learned to play this one as teen praise band leaders. Now that they are young adults in their late 20's, more and more of our young friends are getting married and starting their families. Over the last couple years, we've received the "good news" from expectant parents before and after their precious babies were born. And to see these littles cradled in the arms of the children we ourselves cradled not so long ago ... well, it's amazing and simply heart-melting! For every sweet child born we shout, "GO GOD!!" Each new life begins and the excitement cannot be kept quiet! ♥ ♥ As their births are enthusiastically announced to family and friends, we even more so announce the present of Jesus' presence in our lives!

Continued on page 6.

December 14

Song: *I Saw Three Ships*

I Saw Three Ships is an English Christmas carol. The earliest printed version is from the 17th century. The modern lyrics are from the 1833 version by the English Lawyer William Sandys and consists of nine verses.

The lyrics mention the ships sailing into Bethlehem, but the nearest body of water is the Dead Sea about twenty miles away. The reference to three ships is believed to from the three ships that carried the relics of the Biblical magi to Cologne Cathedral in the 12th century. Another suggestion is that the ships are the camels used by the Magi, as camels are commonly referred to as "ships of the desert".

Verse 1 (could mean the three camels as camels were referred as "ships of the desert.")

Verse 2 (refers to the three Wise Men that brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh.)

I saw three ships come sailing in
On Christmas Day on Christmas Day
I saw three ships com sailing in
On Christmas Day in the morning.

And what was in those ships all three
On Christmas Day on Christmas Day
And what was in those ships all three
On Christmas Day in the morning.

Our Savior Christ and His lady
On Christmas Day on Christmas Day
Our Savior Christ and His lady
On Christmas Day in the morning

Then let us all rejoice again
On Christmas Day on Christmas Day
Then let us all rejoice again
On Christmas Day in the morning

Heavenly Father, in order to redeem us all and lead us to yourself, You sent us your adored Son, who was made flesh and born of the virgin Mary. Father, we thank you, for the love of your Son now lives in our hearts.

By Joanne & Jim Hogle

Song: God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen

Just writing these words make me smile with Hope... How much more powerful when sung by a choir, especially during Advent season. It is thought to be one of the oldest Christmas carols originating sometime in the 1500's in England. Several key words vary in translation from Old English or Anglo-Saxon language.... *Rest* translates to "to Make", and *merry* means "mighty", *dismay* is similar to "troubled, frightened". So, this is how it was read hundreds of years ago.

"God make you mighty gentlemen,
let nothing trouble or frighten you,
Remember Christ our Savior
was born on Christmas Day."

What do we do during Advent Season? We remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas day. What better song to remind us to take heart, have faith, to not be troubled or frightened. As we sing through the additional verses, we sing the story of Christ's humble birth. The Chorus then declares what is ours to have in Christ our Saviour.

"O tidings of comfort and joy.... tidings, the news of events that took place, news that uplifts us, the promise of strength, support, comfort and joy."

My prayer, Father God, during the Christmas season: may we remember and reflect on the tidings of comfort and joy of Advent season in our Christian faith.

By Kim Zerns



December 16

Song: Let All Together Praise Our God

This wonderful Christmas carol is essentially a call to all who hear it to join with others, especially during the Christmas season, to worship God like its first verse encourages. This is a practice that the Bible most certainly encourages. But what reason is mentioned as to *why* people should come together to worship? Well, that reason is obvious in every verse, beginning with the fact that “*God sent His only Son as an infant small...to a manger in a stall.*” Yes, the reason for all to come together to worship God is found in the awesome words of the Christmas Gospel story of Luke 2.

And this wonderful carol even *prompts* our worship and praise by telling us in its last two verses that God sent His Son Jesus to become that *infant small* so that He could make a “**wonderful exchange**” from being divine to being human in order to share God’s glory with us. And He became that *infant small* so that He could later open the way to heaven to *all* who would believe in Him.

Some benefits of praising God together, as we do every time we come together for worship at Bethel, and *not* just as Christmas time, include confirming that God is *still* our God and that we are *still* the people that He loves, the replenishing/strengthening of our weary souls, the providing of a refreshing oasis of faith, and the offering of mutual support and blessing that we can and should give to one another. In fact, the Bible says that people *should not* neglect coming together for worship in Hebrews 10:25. It says: “**let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another**”. Thank you, Saint Paul, for reminding us!

So, **WOW!!!** What an awesome Christmas gift is found in the words of this wonderful Christmas carol! My hope is that every time you sing it, you’ll allow its meaning to make its way down deep in your soul so that you’ll be moved to live each day with a lot more joy.

See you in Church!
Pastor Dave



Song: The Little Drummer Boy

The little boy opens with instructions ‘come, they told me’ And the lyrics go on to say ‘our finest gifts we bring’. This is an invitation to come and see the newborn KING, Jesus, in the manger and to honor Him with the finest gifts available. We know the story of the wise men from the East that brought expensive gifts and showered them on the King.

“When they saw the star they were overjoyed...Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.” **Matthew 2:10-11**

The song goes on to the drummer boy saying, ‘I am a poor boy, too’ and ‘I have no gift to bring’ ‘that’s fit for a king.’ This poor boy was on the spot, he knew he needed to be there and that gifts were expected, but he did not have one remotely acceptable for a king. The boy asked, ‘shall I play for you?’ and ‘Mary nodded.’ He played for Jesus offering the only gift he had to bring and to show his admiration for the king.

Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.’ **Mark 12:43-44**

Jesus recognized the widow for her giving what she could, and this ties well into the story about the drummer boy. ‘I played my best for Him.’ ‘Then He smiled at me.’ This brings a nice clarity to the song. The little boy gave his best, and the newborn king smiled.

Heavenly Father, help me to see where my gifts: Time, Treasure, and Talent will bring a smile. Amen.

By Jim Herr



December 18

Song: O Little Town of Bethlehem

Many years ago when I was in my teenage years, this was my favorite Christmas carol. In fact, one year my Grandma Hiller, knowing that, sent me, just me, a Christmas card with the words of this Christmas carol on the front cover. It was special enough that I kept it in my Bible for a long time. I still love this carol and when I re-read it recently I know why. The last sentence in each verse clearly tells of the hope and joy we have in Christ our Lord.

The song was written by Phillip Brooks in 1868 when he needed a Christmas song for the children's service at his Episcopal church in Philadelphia. Remembering a Christmas Eve service in the Holy Land in 1865 at Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity and how impressive it was to him, he decided to write "O Little Town of Bethlehem" for the children of his church.

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth." **Micah 5:2, 4**

By Vicki Cooper



Song: *Of the Father's Love Begotten*

If the words of the hymn “Of the Father’s Love Begotten” sound like they came from an earlier time, they should – the fifth century! The greatest Christian poet of that time was Aurelius Clemens Prudentius, a well-educated man who lived in Spain and who had been a judge and ruler of two cities. But at age fifty-seven he chose to leave his prosperity and to write for the church instead, turning out theological explanations and personal devotions – all written in poetry.

In the 1800s, J. M. Neale and H. W. Baker translated part of a long poem Prudentius had written for personal devotions, and they paired it with a plainsong melody from the thirteenth century. The verses reflect creeds of the church: Christ is begotten of the Father, He existed before the beginning of time, and He is Alpha and Omega.

The simple, old-fashioned verses help me remember that the truths of our faith are eternal. And singing truths to our Lord and God – whether in ancient songs or modern – bring Him glory!

Let the heights of heav’n adore Him;
Angel hosts, His praises sing;
Pow’rs, dominions, bow before Him
And extol our God and King;
Let no tongue on earth be silent,
Every voice in concert ring
Evermore and evermore!

(If you’d like to hear this old hymn, there are many versions of it on YouTube, as well as a simple version on Hymnary.org.)

By Patti Ordower



December 20

Song: Ring Christmas Bells

Ring Christmas Bells, Merrily Ring....

There are several versions of this song. The Lyrics were written by Mykola Leontovych in 1947.

When I hear this carol, I can't help but be uplifted. Can anything be more joyful than hearing the bells ringing, celebrating the birth of Jesus?

We are called to spread this Joy. As Christians we are called not only to spread the word by our deeds and actions, but also to do it with a sense of Joy and love for one another.

“Ring Christmas Bells, sound far and near, The Birthday of Jesus is here”.

As a child Jesus' birthday is all about the presents that we get for His birthday, but as we get older we appreciate this celebration and have a better understanding of all that His birth means for us. This year, I have lost people I love; but also celebrated the birth of a beautiful grandchild, and I see Jesus' hand in both of these events.

“Ring Christmas Bells merrily ring, Tell all the world Jesus is King.” My hope is that we carry the joy of this song throughout the year.

Heavenly Father, I pray that the Joy of this carol carries throughout the year and that the spirit of the season allows us to “spread your good news” and ring the bells of Joy. Amen

By Linda Crist



Song: The Star Carol

Written & composed by then American jazz musician Alfred Burt born April 22, 1920 in Michigan it comes by the way of Episcopalian roots. This delightful Christmas Carol got it's start, believe it or not, as a poem on a handmade Christmas Card sent out to family & friends.

In 1954, endeared by his family's tradition & started by his father the Reverend, this little poem was soon The ✨ Star 🎵 Carol 🎄 & the rave of all.

By 1958-1959 with help from Miss Peggy Lee, Capitol Records & Simon & Garfunkel, it made it to the Billboard #4 !!!!

Light & sweet in melody, it is an easily recognizable Christmas Song by all faiths.

Written in 3 simple verses, it frames His humble & gentle beginnings as our sweet baby Jesus in a manger with the heavenly Stars all around twinkling & Shining down upon Him.☩

In Perfect Cadence, it's delicate sing-song flow has a cherished peacefulness to it that is well-remembered by children of all ages especially the "young at heart 🤎" like me.

Merry Christmas!

By Lynne Van De Mark



Song: *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*

Edmund Sears

For Christians, one of the rich traditions of the Advent and Christmas season is the singing of favorite hymns. Many of us have our favorites and look forward to singing them on Sunday morning. I can honestly say I don't have a "favorite" hymn as many are special to me. My car radio will be tuned to holiday music for much of the month of December because it makes me happy and fills me with holiday spirit. While the non-religious songs are fun, it's the hymns that I find the most meaningful. Songs like *Mary Did You Know* and *Emmanuel* move me deeply each time I hear them.

For this devotional, I will focus on *It Came Upon a Midnight Clear*. This longstanding Christmas hymn made its debut in 1850. The lyrics were originally written as a five-stanza poem that was eventually set to music. Its words include the well-known Christmas message of "Peace on earth, good will to men", words originally penned by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. It will surely be on the song list this coming Christmas.

Hymns are songs of praise to Christ and there is comfort in joining our voices together to sing praises for God's greatest gift to humanity. As we prepare for His coming, let's be sure to embrace the joy that comes with singing the songs of the season.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we lift our voices in praise-filled song to honor the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ. We thank you for the gift of music and for the talented writers and musicians who have used their God-given talents to create special hymns for celebrating the Christmas season.

Christmas blessings to all,
Judy Knafel

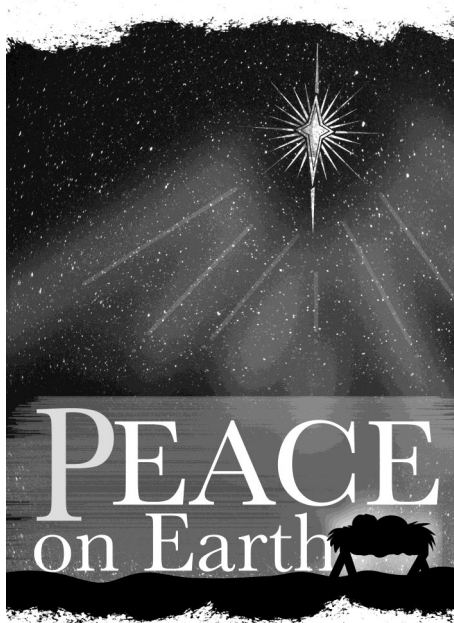
It
Came
Upon a
Midnight
Clear



Song: *Peace Came to Earth*

Like many, I suppose, I find myself longing for peace as I think of all my cares and worries, all the pain and suffering I see around me, all the bitter conflict in our own country, and wars in so many places. It seems we will never have peace in this fallen world. While it is sometimes hard to imagine, this is exactly what God promises: true and lasting peace, joy, and love. Peace that comes from knowing that God's love is so great that He sent His Son and that He, Jesus, has won for us forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation. I can't help but think about the shepherds hearing the angels sing "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." I think about Mary and Joseph when they first held baby Jesus and the peace, love, and joy they must've felt, despite all the challenges that lay ahead. And just like them, despite all that is wrong with our world today, we too can have peace through faith in what Jesus has done for us. During this special season, I pray that we all may take time to sit quietly and be immersed by Jesus' loving presence and peace, and may God bless us all and fill us with His peace. Amen

By Gary and Susan Tobison



Song: *Mary's Little Boy Child***Mary's Little Boy Child**

*Long time ago in Bethlehem, so the Holy Bible say
 Mary's boy child, Jesus Christ, was born on Christmas Day
 Hark, now hear the angels sing, a king was born today
 And man will live forevermore because of Christmas Day*

Mary's miracle baby was coming. Today is the day that the world will experience the birth of its savior. As a mother, I have experienced this feeling of anticipation, the longing to hold your child in your arms. The 9 months of waiting, the physical discomfort that comes with growing a baby and the joy that comes when the baby is delivered is like none other. God is about to share the most wondrous gift with mankind. As foretold so long ago, God's promise is about to come to fruition. It's Christmas Day!

The birth of Jesus is the fulfilment of Isaiah, a great prophet of the Old Testament, who announced the coming birth of the Messiah. *"The Lord himself shall give you a sign," he declared. "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14)*

Jesus came so that we would not be alone. It means that by taking on mortal flesh, God would know what it means to be human – to know joy and to know suffering, to know disappointment, to know friendship and love. God keeps His promises. He promised us a way of salvation. Through Jesus, we have forgiveness of our sins and a path to eternal life.

Christmas provides a wonderful opportunity for reflection and revelation. One of the most important questions we can ask ourselves is this: "What does the birth of Jesus Christ mean to me?"

Dear Lord,

As we take time today to ponder the importance of Jesus and His birth on this day, this CHRISTMAS DAY, we can rejoice. Mary's boy child has arrived and we will live forevermore. Thank you God for sending Your Son on one glorious night to be born of a virgin, to live a perfect life, and to die on the cross for my sins. Thank you that He rose from the dead three days later and that this Christmas and every Christmas, we can celebrate the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hallelujah!!

By Cathy Crosley

Song: The First Noel

The First Noel is a traditional English Christmas Carol. Noel translates in Hebrew to “Christmas” and in Latin translates “To Be Born”. I’ve always loved this hymn and thought of it as the very first Christmas Eve when Jesus was born. On the first Christmas Eve, the angel spread the good news of Jesus Christ’s birth to the lowly shepherds in the fields. What an honor! It describes the story from Luke 2, which then explains how the shepherds were the first to share the glorious news to the world after the angel visited them and told them about Jesus. It goes on to describe how the Wise Men followed the star that led them to Jesus so they could worship him and give him gifts. This is the beauty of this song. God chose to reveal his son to lowly shepherds in this very humble birth. Think of this awesome fact that the son of God did this for us! Jesus loved us so much that he came as a baby to be born and die for us. What peace this brings, and this is how I feel when I sing this song. Peace! Noel! All is well! Born is the King of Israel!

By Anna Marie Hill



The First Noel



For surely
I KNOW THE
plans
I have for
YOU,
says the *Lord...*
TO GIVE YOU A
future
WITH *Hope.*
Jeremiah 29:11, NRSV



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