

*Carols  
of  
Christmas*

AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

2025

# Carols *of* Christmas

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## INTRODUCTION

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There's something special about Christmas carols. Maybe it's the way “O Come, All Ye Faithful” fills your heart with the *Christmas spirit* or how singing “Silent Night” can instantly transport you back to a past candlelight service. These songs aren't just seasonal background music—they tell the greatest story ever told, and they've been doing it for hundreds of years. This Advent, we want to slow down and really listen to what these familiar carols are saying about the birth of Jesus and what it means for our lives today.

As you journey through this daily Advent Devotional, you'll find a short devotion and prayer written by one of our pastors, each one inspired by a different Christmas carol and anchored in Scripture. We've also provided the lyrics of the carol so you can read along. Included with each devotion is a QR code you can scan with your smart phone that will take you to a video where you can sing along with the carol. Whether you're worshiping alone or gathered around the table with your family, we hope these daily moments will add some joy and meaning to your Advent celebration.

Merry Christmas!

# Hope

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week 1

DECEMBER 1

*O Come, O Come Emmanuel*

*O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
And ransom captive Israel,  
That mourns in lonely exile here,  
Until the Son of God appear.  
Rejoice! Rejoice!  
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!*

*O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer  
Our spirits by Thine advent here;  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
And death's dark shadows put to flight.  
Rejoice! Rejoice!  
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!*

*O come, Desire of nations, bind  
All peoples in one heart and mind;  
Bid envy, strife, and quarrels cease;  
Fill the whole world with heaven's peace.  
Rejoice! Rejoice!  
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!*



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*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

Luke 4:18-19

Jessica Buchanan went to Africa to help people, but in October of 2011, armed Somali pirates took her captive. Her captors demanded a \$45 million ransom. For 93 days, while her family waited helplessly, Jessica lived a nightmare. But someone was coming for her. In January of 2012, the elite SEAL Team VI parachuted in, overwhelmed her captors, and carried her to freedom. She had once faced certain death but now had returned to her family with abundant joy.

Is this not what Jesus did for us and what we are rejoicing over this Christmas? We were once captive to sin and unable to pay our ransom, but Jesus came to redeem us and set us free.

In Luke 4, Jesus had just returned home to Nazareth where He had been rejected by His hometown folks. He arrives at the Temple and opens the Scriptures to Isaiah 61 and declares His mission statement. He proclaims that He came empowered by the Holy Spirit and anointed by God for one purpose – to save us from sin and despair. He came to preach the gospel to the poor and needy. He has come to heal the brokenhearted. He has come to set the captives and oppressed free. This is why He came to earth. No wonder the Scriptures declare, *“If anyone is free in Christ, he is free indeed.”*

So that is what we celebrate today. It's what we're rejoicing over when we sing "O Come, O Come Emmanuel." Emmanuel has come! Not just for the Jewish people, but for all of us. He has brought salvation, hope, joy, deliverance, and peace to you and me. We have every reason to celebrate our salvation and our Savior. As we start this month of December, let us begin with a renewed commitment to follow Jesus with complete surrender. He is worth it.

~ Pastor Ed



*Dear heavenly Father. Thank you for the gift of your Son. Thank you for salvation in Him. Thank you that Jesus provides everything we need. He provides salvation, deliverance, and restoration. Our hope is in Him. Thank you for the greatest gift ever given. We offer this prayer in the Name above every Name, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.*

*Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus*

*Come, Thou long-expected Jesus,  
Born to set Thy people free;  
From our fears and sins release us;  
Let us find our rest in Thee.  
Israel's strength and consolation,  
Hope of all the earth Thou art;  
Dear desire of ev'ry nation,  
Joy of ev'ry longing heart.*

*Born Thy people to deliver,  
Born a child, and yet a King,  
Born to reign in us forever,  
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.  
By Thine own eternal spirit  
Rule in all our hearts alone;  
By Thine all-sufficient merit,  
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.*



*Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel...and [he] said, "Lord...my eyes have seen Your salvation that You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to Your people Israel."*

Luke 2:25-32

One Christmas, we ordered a gift for our child that was to be delivered to our house. Unfortunately, the delivery was scheduled to arrive on the very day we were planning to leave town to visit family. Because we needed to leave at a specific time, I found myself awaiting its arrival, eagerly waiting. Was it going to come? Would the delivery make it in time? It was like watching a clock tick; Time—and the delivery—were dragging by. So, we continued to wait and wait.

In the same way, the people of Israel had waited for the Messiah. They didn't just wait for a few hours; they waited for thousands of years. For generations, they had expected the Messiah to come and bring them salvation from the curse of sin. In Genesis 5, they are seen longing for the One who would bring them *relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands* (Genesis 5:29). They sang Psalm 2 and Psalm 110, looking forward to the Messiah and how He will rule over all the rulers of the earth once He comes. The prophet Isaiah foretold of the Suffering Servant who would bring healing to His people (Isaiah 53), while Jeremiah spoke of the Messiah who would be King (Jeremiah 23:5). In the coming of the Messiah, they recognized that God would deliver their salvation.

To long for the Messiah is to long for Jesus. When talking with His disciples after the resurrection, Jesus explained that the Scriptures—from Moses to the prophets—were all speaking about and looking towards Him. Jesus was the Messiah who would bring relief from the crushing weight of sin; the One who had come to bring healing and rule as the King of His people. The people had expected His arrival, and at long last, He had come.

For Christians on this side of His incarnation, the reality is that we must still desire His coming. As the carol says, "born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring. By thine own eternal spirit rule in all our hearts alone." The longing that Christ would usher His kingdom into our hearts and rule every aspect must be the focus of our lives, even beyond the Christmas season. He has come, and we must long for His eternal Spirit to reign in us, His people. This Christmas, ask the question: Do you sing with the choir of Christians, "O Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus"?

~ Pastor BJ



*Father, we thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus. We praise that You have not forgotten Your people but have overcome our sin and rebellion to bring life. As we sing that Christ has come, we continue to look towards His second coming – longing to know Him. Reveal yourself to us, Christ, that we may know and love You. Come, our long-expected Jesus.*

DECEMBER 3

*Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming*

*Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming  
From tender stem hath sprung!  
Of Jesse's lineage coming  
As men of old have sung.  
It came, a flower bright,  
Amid the cold of winter,  
When half-gone was the night.*

*Isaiah 'twas foretold it,  
The Rose I have in mind:  
With Mary we behold it,  
The virgin mother kind.  
To show God's love aright  
She bore to men a Savior,  
When half-gone was the night.*

*This Flow'r, whose fragrance tender  
With sweetness fills the air,  
Dispels with glorious splendor,  
The darkness ev'rywhere.  
True man, yet very God,  
From sin and death He saves us,  
And lightens ev'ry load.*



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*There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.*

Isaiah 11:1

When archaeologists were excavating the ruins at Masada in the 1960s, they made an unusual discovery: a jar containing ancient date palm seeds. They had been reserved for nearly 2,000 years. For decades, they were stored away, apparently forgotten. Then, in 2005, a professor sought to revive these ancient seeds. After carefully watering them and treating them with a growth hormone solution, she planted one of the seeds. To the surprise of many, the seed sprouted and grew into a Judean date palm tree. The tree was dubbed *Methuselah* in honor of the longest living character in the Bible. This botanical *miracle* demonstrated that—under the right conditions—life can emerge from what appears to be lifeless.

There was once a time in the journey of God's people that His promises appeared lifeless to them. God had once pledged to King David—the son of Jesse—that He would establish his kingdom forever (2 Samuel 7:12-13). He offered hope concerning the Messiah who would come to redeem His people. Sadly, this hope of an eternal king and His kingdom began to fade as the people of Israel and their leaders persistently walked in disobedience. Within a few generations, the future of the royal line of David appeared to be dead when God's judgment fell upon His people, and they were sent into Babylonian exile. Yet, before they lost their kingdom, Isaiah issued a prophecy while invoking the name of David's father: *There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch*

DECEMBER 3 cont.

*from his roots shall bear fruit.* Who was this shoot of new life that comes from the apparent lifeless stump of Jesse and David's family line? It was and is Jesus, of course! (See Matthew 1:1-16 and Luke 3:23-38). The Lord is faithful to His promises! Life can indeed emerge from what appears lifeless!

The classic Christmas carol, "Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming," reminds us of the royal genealogy of Jesus. The lyrics emphasize God's faithful fulfillment of Isaiah 11:1 in springing forth a fragrant rose—the Messiah—from Jesse's lineage. Praise be, this "true man, yet very God" has come to save us from sin and death. As you sing the beautiful words of this song and as you read the fulfilled prophecies of our Lord's coming into the world, may you be filled with a newfound hope. Because of Jesus, spiritual life in you can emerge from what was once spiritual death.

~ Pastor Darren



*Lord, I thank You for the reminder that You remain true to Your promises. I am also grateful for the hopeful news that You bring about new life out of death.*

DECEMBER 4

*Emmanuel*

*Emmanuel, Emmanuel,  
His name is called Emmanuel;  
God with us, revealed in us;  
His name is called Emmanuel.*



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*"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).*

Matthew 1:23

Written in 1976 for The King's Temple Church in Seattle, Emmanuel joined our hymnal in 1991. Born from the *Jesus People* movement, this beloved song now graces over 30 hymnals, proclaiming Jesus as "God with us."

The song draws inspiration from Matthew 1:23 in which Isaiah 7:14 is quoted: *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.* Matthew, however, adds an explanation: Immanuel means "God with us." This helps us understand the angel's conversation with Joseph. Doubting, confused, and uncertain, Joseph needed God's assurance: Jesus was no ordinary baby. He fulfilled the covenant promises that so many of Joseph's ancestors had anticipated. About 700 years prior, Isaiah set the stage. Now, in THIS baby, the fulfillment is occurring! God is now present among His people, having revealed Himself to us through Jesus.

The baby, named "God with us," saves His people from their sins! Oh, what a name! Oh, what a Savior! Oh, what an incarnation – God is with His people, as He was in the Garden. Though they had anticipated the fulfillment of this promise, it seemed nearly impossible to comprehend. It had been so long, and God's people had been so rebellious. Even so, God who is now with us *is not slow to fulfill his promises* (2 Peter 3:9).

Matthew told us who He is. John told us, in John 1:14, what we see: *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among*

*us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.* We are like Joseph: we face uncertainty, doubt, and confusion even today. Yet, these are the very moments when we need the reminder that God is not distant but present, just as He promised. Jesus, our Emmanuel, entered history to dwell with us, revealing God's glory and grace. His incarnation shows us that God's presence is not confined to the past but is alive in our lives, transforming our fears into faith.

This Advent, let us cling to the truth that Jesus is still Emmanuel, "God with us." Before He returned to heaven, He promised to remain by our side through every trial: *"Behold, I am with you always"* (Matthew 28:20). And throughout the Scriptures, assures us of His presence: *"I will never leave you nor forsake you"* (Hebrews 13:5). So, in our moments of doubt, let us turn to the One whose presence strengthens us to live boldly, knowing that God who fulfilled His promise 700 years after Isaiah continues to be with us.

~ Pastor Monty



*Father, remind me constantly that You are the Keeper of Your promises and that You are with me. Draw my attention to You so that I turn to You first in moments of uncertainty, doubt, and confusion. Thank You for being with me!*

DECEMBER 5

*O Little Town of Bethlehem*

*O little town of Bethlehem,  
How still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
The silent stars go by;  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth  
The everlasting Light;  
The hopes and fears of all the years  
Are met in thee tonight.*

*How silently, how silently  
The wondrous gift is giv'n!  
So God imparts to human hearts  
The blessing of His heav'n.  
No ear may hear His coming,  
But in this world of sin,  
Where meek souls will receive Him still  
The dear Christ enters in.*

*O holy child of Bethlehem! Descend to us, we  
pray;  
Cast out our sin, and enter in,  
Be born in us today!  
We hear the Christmas angels  
The great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with us,  
Our Lord Immanuel!*



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*But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.*

Micah 5:2

What comes to mind when you think of Christmas? Do you instantly think of decorations, shopping, baking, wrapping gifts, family get-togethers, programs, and the busyness that the Christmas season inevitably brings? Don't get me wrong, those things are not bad. I enjoy the traditions associated with the holiday season as much as anyone. As much as I go all-in on celebrating Christmas, nearly every single year I commit to not being as busy as I was the previous year. Oftentimes, to no avail!

Phillips Brooks, the author of "O Little Town of Bethlehem," includes a phrase that can drastically alter how we approach this incredibly significant season of celebration. In stanza four, he writes, "O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel." In a biblical sense, the word abide means to remain, dwell, stay, or continue. It signifies a deep, intimate connection and an ongoing relationship with God. Is this how you describe your relationship with Christ? What if this Christmas, we chose to abide? How would our Christmas celebrations differ from previous years if we committed to abiding in Christ? How would our approach and anticipation of the upcoming year change?

For many, it might seem natural or easy to focus on Jesus during Christmas. You are reading an Advent devotional, after all. But what if this Christmas we decided to remain, or abide, with Christ for the entire year, not just when we

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are celebrating His birth? As Christ followers, we have the privilege of experiencing His presence, power, and peace all year long, not solely at Christmas. Jesus Himself says, *“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me”* (John 15:4) Commit to abiding in Christ. What are you waiting for?

How is your walk with Christ? What is preventing you from committing to abide in Him? Christmas is an excellent time to reset and refocus our priorities.

~ Pastor Danny



*Father, please help me abide in You this Christmas and throughout the upcoming year. Please bring to mind anything preventing me from being in a growing relationship with You. Forgive me for my failures. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Love

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week 2

DECEMBER 8

## *God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen*

*God rest you merry, gentlemen,  
let nothing you dismay,  
remember Christ our Savior  
was born on Christmas Day  
to save us all from Satan's pow'r  
when we were gone astray.  
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy;  
O tidings of comfort and joy.*

*From God our heav'nly Father  
a blessed angel came  
and unto certain shepherds  
brought tidings of the same;  
how that in Bethlehem was born  
the Son of God by name.  
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy;  
O tidings of comfort and joy.*

*Now to the Lord sing praises  
all you within this place,  
and with true love and brotherhood  
each other now embrace;  
this holy tide of Christmas  
all other doth deface.  
O tidings of comfort and joy,  
comfort and joy;  
O tidings of comfort and joy.*



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*By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*

John 13:35

“O tidings of comfort and joy” is repeated at the end of each stanza of “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen.” What are *tidings*? Merriam-Webster defines it as *a piece of news*. So what news are we singing about in this carol? The good news is that Christ has been born, and He, the Savior of the world, brings comfort and joy with Him! The theme of this carol revolves around the idea that we need not worry about Satan’s power because Christ has come to save us from the dominion of darkness.

Philippians 4:7 reminds us that *the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*. We may not understand it because we certainly don’t deserve it, but God’s peace is powerful and all-encompassing. It can withstand the most difficult circumstances, and it will shine through even the thickest veil of darkness that may cover our minds. We sing about the good news of Christ’s birth, and we are comforted knowing that through Him, we will be saved. John 16:33 says, *“I have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world, you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”*

To have comfort in Christ is an incredible thing. Because we have comfort and everlasting peace in Christ, we also have joy, which expresses itself in praise! 1 Peter 1:8 tells us, *Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.*

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In the final stanza of this carol, we sing, “Now to the Lord sing praises all you within this place, and with true love and brotherhood each other now embrace.” This section of the song is the response and conclusion to the first few stanzas. Because of Christ’s birth, we have comfort and joy. Now what? As our key verse states, “By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). We are to respond to Christ’s salvation directly through love by praising Him. Our next response is to love others. In fact, these are commands that Christ Himself has given us.

Have you shown love to both Christ and others today? Let’s remember that these commands are what set us apart from all others. We will be known by our love!

~ Pastor David



*Father, we thank You for salvation, and we return love back to You with praise and love for others. We celebrate the birth of Christ and the story of the nativity. It’s because of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross that we can come boldly before Your throne.  
In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

DECEMBER 9

### *O Holy Night*

*O, holy night! the stars are brightly shining;  
It is the night of the dear Savior’s birth.  
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,  
Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.  
A thrill of hope - the weary world rejoices,  
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!  
Fall on your knees! O hear the angel voices!  
O night divine, O night when Christ was born!  
O night, O holy night, O night divine!*

*Led by the light of faith serenely beaming,  
With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand.  
So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming,  
Here came the Wise Men from Orient land.  
The King of kings lay thus in lowly manger,  
In all our trials born to be our Friend.  
He knows our need — to our weakness is no stranger.  
Behold your King, before Him lowly bend!  
Behold your King, before Him lowly bend!*

*Truly He taught us to love one another;  
His law is love and His gospel is peace.  
Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother,  
And in His name all oppression shall cease.  
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we;  
Let all within us praise His holy name.  
Christ is the Lord! O praise His name forever!  
His pow’r and glory evermore proclaim!  
His pow’r and glory evermore proclaim!*



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*Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Philippians 2:9-11

What happens when you combine the efforts of an atheist lyricist, a Jewish music composer, and an apostate translator? You get one of the most beloved Christmas carols, “O Holy Night.”

In 1843, Placide Cappeau, a French poet and avowed atheist, was commissioned by a local parish priest to write a Christmas poem. Despite not being a Christian, Cappeau read the Gospel of Luke for inspiration and, in turn, penned “Cantique de Noël,” including the call to bow in worship before the Christ child. Pleased with what he came up with, Cappeau turned to Adolphe Adam, a Jew, who composed the melody which captured the reverence of the words. It was John Sullivan Dwight, a Unitarian minister who brought the carol to America in 1855 and translated it into English. As a Unitarian, he had rejected traditional Christian beliefs (such as the full divinity of Christ and substitutionary atonement) and he eventually left the ministry altogether, abandoning any form of the orthodox faith. Yet his translation kept the original call to worship: “Fall on your knees, oh hear the angel voices!” Ironically, the Lord used three men who rejected Christ’s divinity to create a carol leading millions to worship the very Savior they denied.

Philippians 2:9-11 reveals the ultimate irony of the composition of “O Holy Night.” Paul declares that God has exalted Jesus to the highest place and given Him *the name that is above every name*. One day, *every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord*. Indeed, a day is coming in which Cappeau the Atheist, Adam the Jew, and Dwight the Apostate will find themselves doing exactly what their carol proclaimed—falling on their knees before Jesus and acknowledging Him as Lord. All the while, their beautiful composition—“O Holy Night”—will be a testimony against them as they join every creature confessing Christ’s supremacy.

We do not have to be like these three men who will bow involuntarily before the Lord, we have the blessing of doing so readily now. When we comprehend that the baby born in Bethlehem on that holiest of nights was THE God made flesh, our immediate response should be to worship. Fall on your knees today in recognition that Jesus Christ is Lord.

~ Pastor Darren



*Lord, I confess that You are Incarnate God. You and You alone are worthy of my worship. I praise Your name now and forever! Your power and glory evermore will I proclaim! Amen.*

*The First Nowell*

*The first Nowell the angel did say,  
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they  
lay;  
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep,  
On a cold winter's night that was so deep.  
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,  
Born is the King of Israel.*

*For all to see there was a star  
Shining in the east, beyond them far,  
And to the earth it gave great light,  
And so it continued both day and night.  
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,  
Born is the King of Israel.*

*Then let us all with one accord  
Sing praises to our heavenly Lord  
Who hath made heav'n and earth of naught,  
And with His blood mankind hath bought.  
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,  
Born is the King of Israel.*



*Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.*

Matthew 2:1-3

I love the anticipation of Christmas morning. When our kids were young, they would get up early because they were too excited to sleep. We used to tell them they couldn't come out of their rooms until the sun came up. Now, we negotiate with them what time we can wake them up. I sometimes wonder if we are more excited than they are. Don't get me wrong. They are still excited, but they don't mind waiting a little later in the morning to open their gifts. But once they are awake, they are ready for gifts. Breakfast can wait! Why? Because they have been anticipating this moment for months.

Now imagine what it must have been like for those who had been looking forward to Christ's birth. The prophecy of His coming was being fulfilled. The moment they had been anticipating for years was finally here. The Wise Men searched for Christ, saying, "*Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him.*" They anticipated Christ's birth. They sought Him. Then, when they found Him, they worshiped Him.

The Wise Men rightly responded to Christ's arrival with worship. We would do well to learn from the Wise Men. While we no longer have to wait for Christ's birth, we can still celebrate it. In fact, we can do so every single day

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in our personal devotion and Bible study time and then corporately every Sunday! Worship was the only proper response for the Wise Men and is the only proper response for every Christ follower.

Do you long to worship Jesus? If not, what is holding you back?

~ Pastor Danny



*Father, thank You for the Christmas story and for the hope that we can all have as a result of Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection. Please help me never take the story of His birth for granted. Help me this Advent season to live with a sense of anticipation and longing for Christmas morning. Help me seek You with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength. And lead me to respond to Your goodness and love for me with worship. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

DECEMBER 11

### *Good Christian Men, Rejoice*

*Good Christian men, rejoice  
With heart and soul and voice!  
Give ye heed to what we say:  
Jesus Christ is born today.  
Man and beast before Him bow,  
And He is in the manger now;  
Christ is born today,  
Christ is born today!*

*Good Christian men, rejoice,  
With heart and soul and voice!  
Now ye hear of endless bliss:  
Jesus Christ was born for this,  
He has opened heaven's door,  
And man is blest forevermore.  
Christ was born for this,  
Christ was born for this!*

*Good Christian men, rejoice  
With heart and soul and voice!  
Now ye need not fear the grave:  
Jesus Christ was born to save;  
Calls you one and calls you all,  
To gain His everlasting hall.  
Christ was born to save,  
Christ was born to save!*



*Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.*

1 Peter 1:8

Happy Birthday to me! Today, I am 83. My birthday falls exactly two weeks from Christmas. My Mom would tell me every year, “I can’t give you much for your birthday; you know Christmas is right around the corner.” I grew up in a single parent home, but my Mom knocked herself out to provide the best Christmas she could provide for her kids. I think she made payments on those presents for the whole next year.

Christmas is a fun time of the year for most people, especially so for children. What joy and laughter they bring us even when they don’t get it all right, like singing, “while shepherds washed their socks by night,” instead of “...watched their flocks...” or they speak of Wise Men coming from “a fire” instead of “afar.” Hey, they are trying to capture the right spirit anyway!

Christmas can be challenging for me because I don’t like surprises. I am afraid I will respond improperly to someone’s best intentions. My mother-in-law always tried to surprise me at Christmas with something I had never received before. She went way beyond the typical gift of socks and ties and tried to be as creative as possible. One year, she gave me a no-fog shower mirror. It fogged! The gifts weren’t always perfect but her intentions were always the best.

Christmas is often surrounded by happiness, joy, and laughter for many of us. Yet, it can be filled with sadness

and sorrow for those who have lost loved ones, have health issues, or lack the financial resources to provide the kind of Christmas they would like to provide.

The commercialization of Christmas can almost create more pressure than we can bear. How do we find a sense of balance amid all the trappings of Christmas? I think the true message of Christmas provides just what we need. The song “Good Christian Men Rejoice” reminds us of that message and our response. We are to rejoice because “Christ is born today.” We rejoice because “He has opened heaven’s door and we are blessed forevermore.” We rejoice because we “need not fear the grave, Jesus Christ was born to save.”

~ Pastor Ed



*Heavenly Father, as all good Christian men and women should do, I rejoice over your coming into this world. I do so with an inexpressible joy. You were born to open Heaven’s door to us. With all my heart, soul, and voice, I worship You.*

*What Child Is This?*

*What Child is this, who, laid to rest  
On Mary's lap, is sleeping?  
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,  
While shepherds watch are keeping?  
This, this is Christ, the King,  
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:  
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,  
The Babe, the Son of Mary!*

*Why lies He in such mean estate,  
Where ox and ass are feeding?  
Good Christian, fear: for sinners here  
The silent Word is pleading.  
This, this is Christ, the King,  
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:  
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,  
The Babe, the Son of Mary!*

*So bring Him incense, gold, and myrrh,  
Come, peasant, king, to own Him;  
The King of kings salvation brings;  
Let loving hearts enthrone Him.  
This, this is Christ, the King,  
Whom shepherds guard and  
angels sing:  
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,  
The Babe, the Son of Mary!*



*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by his Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power. After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

Hebrews 1:1-3

In 1865, William Dix, an insurance manager recovering from severe depression, penned *What Child Is This?* While sick and bedridden, he experienced a time of spiritual renewal that inspired the song. Like shepherds marveling at the Christ child who the prophets had promised, Dix found hope in Jesus' identity, rediscovering the Messiah's sufficiency amid his personal trials. His journey mirrors ours, seeking peace in our dark world.

Hebrews 1:1-3 answers the question of the song. What child is this? He is the One who became flesh, revealing God fully as the eternal Son. He is the Heir, the Creator, the Radiance, the Imprint, the Upholder, and the Purifier. While the song affirms that He is Christ the King, Hebrews teaches us the meaning of this fact. As Son, He is fully divine. As Heir, He owns all that the Father owns. As Creator and Upholder, He made each of us and holds both us and the universe together. As Radiance, He shows us God's glory which Moses was unable to see. As Imprint, He reminds us that when we see Jesus, we see what the Father looks like. As Purifier, He fulfilled the Covenant promises by saving His people from their sin.

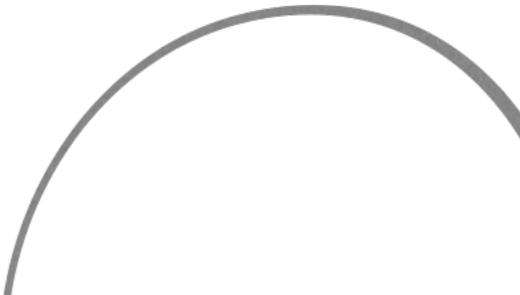
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What child is this? He is our sufficiency! This child promised and provided salvation. Now, He provides strength that we need to live Godly lives in this chaotic and uncertain world. A weary mother with a baby in her lap—tired and overwhelmed—found peace trusting Jesus' presence. Mary would likely affirm the song's encouragement to quickly offer praise and worship to this infant Savior, our worthy King. Let's do the same and enthrone Him, praising Him who brings healing and hope.

~ Pastor Monty



*Thank You, Father, for Your eternal and divine Son.  
Thank You for speaking through Him and for His  
purification for my sin. Remind me of Your presence  
and help me trust Your sufficiency. Help me to  
faithfully tell of Your goodness to humanity!*



# Peace

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week 3

*Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*

Hark! the herald angels sing,  
 "Glory to the new-born King;  
 Peace on earth, and mercy mild;  
 God and sinners reconciled."  
 Joyful, all ye nations, rise,  
 Join the triumph of the skies,  
 With angelic hosts proclaim,  
 "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"  
 Hark! the herald angels sing,  
 "Glory to the new-born King."

Christ, by highest heav'n adored,  
 Christ, the everlasting Lord:  
 Late in time, behold Him come,  
 Offspring of a virgin's womb.  
 Veiled in flesh the God-head see,  
 Hail th'incarnate Deity!  
 Pleased as man with men to dwell,  
 Jesus our Immanuel.  
 Hark! the herald angels sing,  
 "Glory to the new-born King."

Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!  
 Hail the Sun of righteousness!  
 Light and life to all He brings,  
 Ris'n with healing in His wings.  
 Mild He lays His glory by,  
 Born that man no more may die,  
 Born to raise the sons of earth,  
 Born to give them second birth.  
 Hark! the herald angels sing,  
 "Glory to the new-born King!"



*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

John 1:14

*...who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.*

Philippians 2:6-7

Today's carol, written almost 300 years ago by Charles Wesley, originally included 10 verses! Wesley intended the words to be sung to the same tune as his Easter hymn "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today," but they were later set with a secular tune.

About a year prior, weakened by illness, Wesley wrestled with doubts about his salvation. Finally trusting Christ alone, he found peace. His prior legalism was replaced with a personal relationship with Christ as he responded to his study of the New Testament. This encounter with God's grace shaped his desire to proclaim Christ's incarnation and its significance. Passionate about teaching complex theology in a memorable way, he used this song to share his complete amazement with Christ's birth and its implications for our salvation.

The second verse reveals the Messiah that Wesley came to trust and that we await at Advent: He is the everlasting Lord. This reminds us that the eternal Word—fully divine, always existing—came to dwell among us. He is our Immanuel, God with us! God Himself, born of a virgin, became human as He took on flesh like ours. Amazingly,

He was pleased to do so, but it was pleasing to Him because He would save His people from their sin. To save us, He set aside His divine privileges and took the form of a servant. Fully man and fully divine, He became our substitute on the cross.

The third verse declares His purpose: He was born to give us *second birth*. In other words, He was born so that we could be born again. Wesley would say to us that Jesus is worthy to be praised, and that He ought to be praised because He gives us a second birth. His incarnation and salvation inspire angelic praise. There should be no less from us.

God gloriously fulfilled His promises, sending Jesus as Immanuel to dwell with us. His incarnation shows His love, humbly taking a servant's form to offer salvation. Born to give us *second birth*, Jesus transforms our lives, freeing us from sin's power and granting eternal life. Marvel at the incarnation's mystery: the everlasting Lord became human to save us! Like the angels, let us sing of His glory! May we share His light and life, praising our Savior who brings healing and hope.

~ Pastor Monty



*Father, thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, our Immanuel, to save us from our sin. We praise Him because of who He is, and we are grateful for His saving work. Help us trust His presence always and to break forth in praise as the angels do.*

*O Come, All Ye Faithful*

*O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,  
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem!  
Come and behold Him, born the King of  
angels!*

*O come, let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him,  
Christ the Lord!*

*Sing choirs of angels, sing in exultation,  
O sing, all ye bright hosts of heav'n above!  
Glory to God, all glory in the highest!  
O come, let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him,  
Christ the Lord!*

*Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, born this happy  
morning.  
Jesus, to Thee be all glory giv'n;  
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing!  
O come, let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him,  
Christ the Lord!*



*I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die.*

John 11:25-26

Habits are a fascinating concept. They are often something that one does without thinking about it. You are blinking while reading this. Did you think about blinking? You are also breathing; did you consciously make the decision to breathe? More than likely not. Rather, you are probably doing these things that you have done millions and millions of times without having to think about it.

Singing carols at Christmas can quickly become a habit. Why do we sing them? What are we singing? If we step beyond the concept of Christ coming in a manger, rich theological realities are at play. Consider today's carol, one you have probably sung hundreds of times: "O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant, O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem! Come, and behold Him, born the King of angels!"

Did you notice the posture the carol tells you to sing from? Joyful and triumphant. Triumphant?! To be triumphant paints a picture of a warrior who has won a battle. They have defeated the enemy, and they stand victorious. But what battle have *the faithful* won? That is the point of the carol; they haven't. The posture matters as much as the call to action: behold Him. The triumph doesn't belong to the faithful who sing; it belongs to "the King of angels...born that happy morning." It belongs to Christ the Lord.

Jesus talks clearly about His triumph when He declares, *"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me,*

*though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die"* (John 11:25-26). This is the essence of Christ's work at Christmas. He came to triumph over sin and death so that those who believe in Him would triumph in His triumph. Did you catch that in the verse? Those who believe in Him—those who faithfully believe and follow Him—will never truly die, but only know life everlasting! What a triumph we have in the triumph of Christ!

This Christmas, what is to be our response to this amazing victory? "Sing exultation...Glory to God, all glory in the highest!" Praise Him! As those who live faithfully for Him, we are to behold Him, the King of the angels; adore Him, the one who has triumphed; sing to Him, for all glory is to be given to Him. And you get to do all of this triumphantly, for He has triumphed.

~ Pastor BJ



*Father, what You have accomplished for us is overwhelming. We praise the name of Christ, for through His life and death, we know that we can find life. Through His triumph, we know that we can triumph - in this life and the next. Help us to behold Christ for all that He has truly done for us and grow our affection and worship for Him.*

DECEMBER 17

## *Joy to the World*

*Joy to the world! the Lord is come;  
Let earth receive her King;  
Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room,  
And heav'n and nature sing,  
And heav'n and nature sing,  
And heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.*

*Joy to the earth! the Savior reigns;  
Let men their songs employ;  
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains  
Repeat the sounding joy,  
Repeat the sounding joy,  
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.*

*No more let sins and sorrows grow,  
Nor thorns infest the ground;  
He comes to make His blessings flow  
Far as the curse is found,  
Far as the curse is found,  
Far as, far as the curse is found.*

*He rules the world with truth and grace,  
And makes the nations prove  
The glories of His righteousness,  
And wonders of His love,  
And wonders of His love,  
And wonders, wonders of His love.*



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*Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises!*

Psalm 98:4

"Joy to the World" is a popular and upbeat Christmas carol that—surprisingly—was not originally intended to be a Christmas hymn. This carol was first composed as a poem written in 1719 by the famous hymn writer Isaac Watts and was later set to music.

In a collection of works entitled *The Psalms of David, Imitated in the Language of the New Testament*, Isaac Watts set out to create poems from each Psalm with the intention of highlighting Christ's foreshadowed presence found in these Old Testament scriptures. "Joy to the World" was Watts' paraphrase of Psalm 92, which implores the reader to respond with "joyful noise" to the revelation of the Lord.

This passage illuminates the order in which we as Christ-followers should worship the Lord. Step 1: The Lord is revealed to us. Step 2: We respond with joyful praise and adoration! When we first encounter the love of Christ in our lives, we respond with surrender and gratitude, confessing our sins and committing to follow Him. Each time we remember what Christ has done for us, the appropriate response is to praise Him!

Originally written with the second coming of Christ in mind, this carol was later given a Christmastime theme because of the joy surrounding both the second coming of Christ and the first coming at His birth. Luke 2 tells of this *good news that will cause great joy for all the people*. Christ's birth was joyful news for the world because it

meant salvation was near. The coming of the Messiah was a long-anticipated event that would alter the course of history, and the Angels knew it. This is why they praised God at the announcement of this great news shared with the wide-eyed and bewildered shepherds.

What is your response as you remember the salvation of Christ? Does it evoke a joyful expression of love and adoration to Him? If you find yourself in awe of God's goodness but you don't know how to express this awe in a way that is pleasing to God, just take this encouragement from our key passage today: "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises!" Each Sunday, we gather as a church to do exactly that. With knowledge of Christ's first coming, death and resurrection, and the hope of His return, we have all the information that is needed to initiate joyous praise from hearts full of everlasting joy! This praise doesn't have to be limited to our Sunday church service. Let us, *continually offer up a sacrifice of praise!* (Hebrews 13:15)

~ Pastor David



*Lord, bring to our remembrance the goodness of Your salvation. Let us bless Your heart as we respond in joyous praise! In Jesus' name, Amen.*

### *Angels We Have Heard on High*

*Angels we have heard on high,  
Sweetly singing o'er the plains:  
And the mountains in reply,  
Echoing their joyous strains.  
Gloria in excelsis Deo!  
Gloria in excelsis Deo!*

*Shepherds, why this jubilee?  
Why your joyous strains prolong?  
What the gladsome tidings be  
Which inspire your heav'nly song?  
Gloria in excelsis Deo!  
Gloria in excelsis Deo!*

*Come to Bethlehem and see  
Him whose birth the angels sing;  
Come adore on bended knee  
Christ the Lord the newborn King.  
Gloria in excelsis Deo!  
Gloria in excelsis Deo!*

*See Him in a manger laid  
Whom the choirs of angels praise;  
Mary, Joseph, lend your aid,  
While our hearts in love we raise.  
Gloria in excelsis Deo!  
Gloria in excelsis Deo!*



*And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!"*

Luke 2:13-14

Today's carol, "Angels We Have Heard on High," is a unique carol. It is a French hymn that dates back to the 1700s, though it was not published until 1862. What makes this carol unusual is that it does not have just one author. The stanzas are composed of obscure verses written by French poets and a refrain that was literally written by the angels in heaven. "Gloria in excelsis Deo" is a Latin phrase that means *Glory to God in the highest*.

I love this carol because each stanza celebrates Christ's birth, albeit from a different perspective. I want to spend a couple of moments reflecting on the third stanza. It presents a fantastic challenge for each of us. The author of this verse instructs us to "Come to Bethlehem and see Him whose birth the angels sing." While we cannot go to Bethlehem and see the babe in a manger, we do have the opportunity this Christmas to invite people to come to church with us and be introduced to Jesus. Can you imagine the heavenly celebration that will take place when one who is lost discovers the saving message of Jesus this Christmas! The poet concludes this verse with "Come adore on bended knee Christ the Lord the newborn King." Bending a knee is a demonstration of submission, honor, and humility. What an appropriate posture for worshiping the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

This Christmas, let's not miss the opportunity to join with the angels in proclaiming our Savior's birth and marveling at His greatness. A baby was born. A Savior was born. Hope has arrived! Glory to God in the highest!

~ Pastor Danny



*Father, we join with the angels in proclaiming "Glory to God in the highest." Thank You for loving us so much that You sent Your Son to offer us hope. We pray for our family members, friends, coworkers, and neighbors who've never placed their faith and trust in You. Please help them to recognize their need for a Savior. Please give us the boldness to invite them to church this Christmas. We love You, Father. In Jesus' name, Amen*

*Go, Tell It on the Mountain*

Go, tell it on the mountain,  
Over the hills and ev'rywhere;  
Go, tell it on the mountain  
That Jesus Christ is born!

While shepherds kept their watching  
O'er silent flocks by night,  
Behold thro'-out the heavens  
There shone a holy light.  
Go, tell it on the mountain,  
Over the hills and ev'rywhere;  
Go, tell it on the mountain  
That Jesus Christ is born!

The shepherds feared and trembled  
When lo! above the earth  
Rang out the angel chorus  
That hailed our Savior's birth.  
Go, tell it on the mountain,  
Over the hills and ev'rywhere;  
Go, tell it on the mountain  
That Jesus Christ is born!

Down in a lowly manger  
The humble Christ was born,  
And God sent us salvation  
that blessed Christmas morn.  
Go, tell it on the mountain,  
Over the hills and ev'rywhere;  
Go, tell it on the mountain  
That Jesus Christ is born!



*Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!"*

Isaiah 40:9

On December 21, 1968, the crew of Apollo 8 became the first humans to reach the moon. They orbited the lunar surface ten times before returning home. On Christmas Eve during their journey—as their command module floated above the moon—the crew was featured in a global telecast as they beamed back images of the moon and the Earth. In the lead-up to the transmission, the astronauts were encouraged to say something *appropriate* for the occasion. As millions tuned in, what the world heard was the voice of astronaut Bill Anders as he began reading from Genesis 1:1: *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.* Frank Borman and Jim Lovell soon joined in as they read the first eleven verses of the Bible, with Borman finishing with *And God saw that it was good.* He then signed off with “And from the crew of Apollo 8, we close with good night, good luck, a Merry Christmas, and God bless all of you—all of you on the good Earth.” That telecast was the most watched TV program ever with a quarter of the Earth’s population tuning in. With much of the world watching, those astronauts proclaimed the goodness of God.

Just as those astronauts looked out into the vastness of space and chose to proclaim God’s Word for the whole world to hear, Christmas offers us a similar opportunity: to be heralds of God’s good news. There is no greater news to proclaim than the message proclaimed through the

DECEMBER 19 cont.

Nativity: Our Savior has been born! The prophet Isaiah declared, “Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news...say to the cities of Judah, ‘Behold, your God!’” In Isaiah’s day, there was no more prominent location to make a proclamation than a mountain. With the birth of the Messiah, God’s people now have the opportunity to point to Jesus and to say to the world, “Behold your God!”

That’s the very spirit behind the Christmas carol “Go, Tell It On the Mountain.” It reminds us that Christmas is not just for quiet reflection and warm nostalgia; it is for bold proclamation. The shepherds heard the angel’s announcement, and they couldn’t keep it to themselves. We, too, are called to go tell it on the mountain and wherever else the Lord gives us—our homes, our schools, our neighborhoods, and our workplaces. Let us proclaim the goodness of God that Jesus Christ our Savior is born!

~ Pastor Darren



*Lord, I want to be a herald of the good news that our God has come to save us. Remind me that Christmas is more than a tradition that I observe. Inspire me to use my Christmas celebration as an opportunity to point others to You.*

Joy

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week 4

## *We Three Kings of Orient Are*

*We three kings of Orient are:  
Bearing gifts we traverse afar--  
field and fountain, moor and mountain--  
Following yonder star.*

*O star of wonder, star of night,  
Star with royal beauty bright,  
Westward leading, still proceeding,  
Guide us to thy perfect light.*

*Born a King on Bethlehem's plain;  
Gold I bring to crown Him again,  
King forever, ceasing never,  
Over us all to reign.*

*O star of wonder, star of night,  
Star with royal beauty bright,  
Westward leading, still proceeding,  
Guide us to thy perfect light.*

*Glorious now behold Him arise:  
King and God and Sacrifice; Alleluia, Alleluia!  
Earth to heav'n replies.*

*O star of wonder, star of night,  
Star with royal beauty bright,  
Westward leading, still proceeding,  
Guide us to thy perfect light.*



*When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the Child with Mary His mother, and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.*

Matthew 2:10-11

It is likely that your nativity scene is wrong. If it features exactly three wise men wearing king's crowns before a newly baby Jesus, it is definitely wrong. And, yes, one of our beloved Christmas carols—"We Three Kings of Orient Are"—gets some things wrong about the wise men, too. The Bible doesn't tell us there were three of them, nor does it call them kings. Matthew simply refers to them as *magi from the east*. They certainly didn't join the shepherds at a stable on the night of Jesus' birth. Because of the distance they had to travel, they likely arrived in Bethlehem many months later. So, unfortunately, much of this Christmas classic is not accurate.

The carol does get much correct though. It rightly conveys the long journey of the wise men as they traveled hundreds of miles following a westward leading star that supernaturally announced the birth of the Israel's king. It is a beautiful picture of seeking and worshipping Jesus. The gifts they offered to the Christ child upon their arrival—gold, frankincense, and myrrh—were no mere trinkets. Though the Bible does not specify the exact meanings behind the gifts, they may allude to who Jesus is and why He came to Earth. Gold has traditionally been associated with royalty and was—perhaps—their recognition of Jesus' kingship. Frankincense was often

used in worship as a pleasant offering to God (Exodus 30:34) and may have been given as a recognition of Jesus' divinity. Myrrh was a burial spice and this gift to Jesus may have foreshadowed His eventual sacrificial death for our sins.

The journey of the Magi and the offerings they presented to Jesus ought to challenge us profoundly. They didn't let distance, difficulty, or expense prevent them from worshipping Christ. They brought their most precious treasures and laid them at His feet. They risked everything to follow the light God had given them.

Will you seek after the Christ this Christmas? How will you worship Him? What offerings will you bring to Jesus? Like those ancient seekers, we're called to follow faithfully, worship wholeheartedly, and give generously. The question isn't whether we must "traverse afar," but whether we're willing to begin the journey at all.

~ Pastor Darren



*Lord, you are the perfect light and worthy of my seeking and my worship. I am willing to risk everything and to offer my best to follow You.*

*How Great Our Joy*

*While by the sheep we watched at night,  
Glad tidings brought an angel bright.  
How great our joy! Great our joy!  
Joy, joy, joy! Joy, joy, joy!  
Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!  
Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!*

*There shall be born, so he did say,  
In Bethlehem a Child today.  
How great our joy! Great our joy!  
Joy, joy, joy! Joy, joy, joy!  
Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!  
Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!*

*There shall the Child lie in a stall,  
This Child who shall redeem us all.  
How great our joy! Great our joy!  
Joy, joy, joy! Joy, joy, joy!  
Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!  
Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!*

*This gift of God we'll cherish well,  
That ever joy our hearts shall fill.  
How great our joy! Great our joy!  
Joy, joy, joy! Joy, joy, joy!  
Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!  
Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!*



*Then he said to them, "Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."*

Nehemiah 8:10

The Christmas carol we will sing today is unknown to many. This carol's origin is shrouded in mystery, but there are records stating that in the late 1500s, it was translated from German to English. The word *joy* appears 33 times throughout this tune, emphasizing the importance of the joy brought on by knowing the Messiah would soon be born!

Hundreds of years before Christ's birth, God's people had experienced the joy of the Lord through a different circumstance. Having been exiled in Babylon, the Israelites had finally returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the Temple that had been destroyed. Upon completion of the new Temple and the walls of the city, Ezra the priest read from the Law of Moses and reminded the people about God's provision and salvation in the midst of their faithlessness and sin. The people mourned as they remembered their wickedness and all that had happened to anger God. The presence of the Lord, which had been the strength and hope of the Israelites, was no longer in the Temple. Although the Temple had been rebuilt, there was still a sadness that loomed on that day. But Ezra gave the people something to hope for.

In the face of their despair and grief, he stated, "*the joy of the Lord is your strength.*" You see, the presence of the Lord would return to the people. They had every reason

to hope. Their hope was in the Christ, who would come to redeem God's people!

Close to 450 years later, Christ was born, and the long-awaited Messiah had come to save God's people. The writer of Hebrews speaks of the joy that was set before Jesus as He endured the cross (Hebrews 12:2). This joy was in union with the will of God, who was pleased to send His Son to die for the restoration of His people. It was this same joy that gave God's people hope in the days following the exile!

For the same reasons, we have joy in knowing that Christ is our salvation. So when you sing *joy*, sing it with a smile on your face and peace in your heart, knowing that Emmanuel has come!

~ Pastor David



*Father, I thank you for the never-ending joy that You've given to me and all those who call You Lord. In the good times and the bad times, I will trust in Your mighty name and Your faithfulness throughout all generations. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.*

DECEMBER 24

*Silent Night, Holy Night*

*Silent night, holy night,  
All is calm, all is bright  
Round yon virgin mother and child!  
Holy Infant so tender and mild,  
Sleep in heavenly peace,  
Sleep in heavenly peace.*

*Silent night, holy night,  
Wondrous star, lend the light;  
With the angels let us sing  
Alleluia to our King;  
Christ the Savior is born,  
Christ the Savior is born.*



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*And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."*

Luke 2:8-11

"Silent Night" is the one song most churches will be singing tonight. It has a special history. The lyrics were written as a poem by an Austrian priest, Joseph Mohr. When the poem was set to music by Franz Gruber, it was intended to be played on the organ. However, when the organ broke before the service, Gruber quickly composed a simple guitar-based melody. It later became an anthem of peace sung by soldiers during a Christmas truce in World War I. It has also been recorded over 100,000 times and is sung in all major languages worldwide as a universal favorite.

The Virgin Mary is prominently mentioned in the song, as are the Shepherds. However, the central figure is the Christ Child who is described as the Holy Infant, the Savior, and Lord at birth. No wonder there was silence that night. That night marked the arrival of our Savior and Lord.

Luke describes how the angels broke through the quietness of that night to declare that a Savior had been born in the City of David, Christ the Lord. This was the long-awaited Messiah and common shepherds were the first to receive the announcement. What joy and gladness

DECEMBER 24 cont.

must have filled their hearts as they received the greatest news possible!

As you take time for reflection today, sing these beautiful words and reflect on the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Don't let the angels and shepherds be the only ones giving praise today. Let your heart burst forth with joy and praise to the God who gave His Son for you. Don't just reflect on His birth, but also reflect on His life, death, and resurrection. That is the Gospel.

You may be opening Christmas presents tonight or tomorrow, but no gift you will receive will match what God has already given you. If you have not received that gift just yet, it is not too late. This Christmas Eve, make it the best one ever as you open your heart and invite the Savior into your life.

~ Pastor Ed



*Dear heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of Your Son. Thank You for eternal and abundant life I have in Him. Thank You for coming to this earth, forgiving my sin, and giving me a home in heaven. I sing with the angels and the shepherds. This was an unforgettable "Silent Night!" I thank You for Jesus and pray in His name and for His glory. Amen.*

DECEMBER 25

## *I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day*

*I heard the bells on Christmas day  
Their old familiar carols play,  
And wild and sweet the words repeat  
Of peace on earth, good will to men.*

*And in despair I bowed my head:  
"There is no peace on earth," I said,  
"For hate is strong, and mocks the song  
Of peace on earth, good will to men."*

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:  
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;  
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,  
With peace on earth, good will to men."*



[www.fbcocala.org/carols](http://www.fbcocala.org/carols)

*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility.*

Ephesians 2:13-14a

The birth of a child is commonly met with great praise and celebration. I think back to the birth of my son and the fanfare and celebration that surrounded his birth. He had finally arrived and was healthy! My wife and I couldn't wait to get him home and experience life with him. We celebrated and celebrated and are still celebrating that little boy.

Now, imagine if the peace of the entire world rested on the hopes of a baby who was born. No more wars, because of the baby. No more hurt, because of the baby. No more hatred or anger, because of the baby. How much would that birth be celebrated? What if I told you this has happened? The peace of the whole world has come in the form of a baby.

Our carol today tells the story of someone looking for this peace but struggling to find it. "And in despair I bowed my head: 'There is no peace on earth,' I said, 'For hate is strong, and mocks the song of peace on earth, goodwill to men.'" All of us can relate to this, can we not? Moments where—in despair—it feels like peace is fleeting and we will never find it. It feels as if we will never find peace with the people around us, within ourselves—or worse—with our Creator.

Now, enter that baby. Remember the One who the whole world was waiting to bring peace? Ephesians says, *But*

*now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He himself is our peace...* When Christ was born as a baby, He was the One who brought peace! In His sacrificial death, He paid the price of our greatest problems. But even more amazing than Him dying is that He came back to life. And as our carol exclaims, if He has come back to life, peace is always possible. "God is not dead, nor doth He sleep; The wrong shall fail, the right prevail, with peace on earth, goodwill to men."

The message of Christmas reminds us that the peace we long for doesn't rest in the hands of a God who is distant or dead, but in One who is alive and active! He isn't sleeping in your most significant moments of need but is active and present to bring peace in your life. He brings peace to our lives today, the same peace that will follow us into eternity. Praise be to God!

~ Pastor BJ



*Father, on this Christmas Day, we give You thanks for the peace we have in Jesus Christ. To have peace with those around us, within ourselves, and with You is the greatest gift of all. Help us, this day, to live out and champion this peace.*



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