

Caroling to the Nativity

Advent Devotional
2024

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My friends,

It first dawned on me that different families have different Christmas traditions after Deann and I got married. Only then did I discover that cornbread dressing was not the high point of everyone's Christmas dinner! And just as different families have different customs around Christmas, so do churches.

For example, not every church produces their own Advent devotional booklet. Actually, I don't remember my home church ever doing one. Yet, while such booklets were not a part of my early years, I have come to appreciate the insights and reflections that different people bring to this time of year.

This year's Advent devotional booklet here at FCC will center around various Advent hymns and Christmas carols. This is another area where churches have different traditions--music at Christmas. The carols that are favorites in one church, may not be considered a favorite in another church. But something that is true in many churches is that we sing a lot of carols at Christmas without really thinking about their meaning and significance.

That is one reason that I am excited about this year's Advent devotional. I know for certain that there is one carol I am not familiar with--the one that is for my devotion! And, I am sure there will be others. But all of that is okay, as maybe we will discover a new carol that we aren't familiar with, or maybe come to a deeper appreciation for one that we have sung all of our lives. Whatever is the case, I have no doubt that the devotional thoughts contained in this booklet will be meaningful, especially during this special time of year.

To those of have written devotions, thank you! To all of us who will be reading these devotions, prepare to be blessed!

Merry Christmas, Hank



The House Is Bright

The house is bright, our praise we sing
To welcome in that day;
When Christ in ancient Bethlehem
In Mary's arms did lay.
Let ivy, holly, pine, and spruce -
These evergreens make known
The cheer of all who now extol
The babe from heaven's throne.

Green branches hang, steadfast are they
Through winter's death and drear;
As steadfast is the Savior's love
In anguish, grief, and fear.
And crownly wreaths adorn the walls
Whose leafy branches tell
Of piercing thorns and later death
Of our Emmanuel.

Tall candles with their flames aglow
Do faithful watches keep
While prayers of hope and joy ascend
To him whose love we seek.
The tree, so stately, trimmed and bright,
Stands proudly to proclaim
A friendly fellowship of all
Assembled in His name.

Now everyone that dwells on earth,
Rise up and with us sing!
'Tis now the season of His birth,
The birth of mankind's king.
Sing joyfully the songs of old,
Sing clear the carols new;
Proclaim the Savior long foretold;
Declare His message True! Amen.



December 1, 2024

I love Christmas lights! Every year I make sure to go out for a drive, or several, just to go around different neighborhoods and look at the lights. I also go over to East Peoria to the Festival of Lights and smile like a big kid the whole way through.

I also really dislike hanging up Christmas lights. I don't think I ever get them even, I either have way too many lights for the roofline or *just* not enough, and most of all I don't have the patience to do anything more than a single strand. Leading up to advent, there's so much work to do to plan church decorations and worship services and all of the graphics. Then it arrives, and all of the planning is now just waiting to be executed. I love the Christmas season, it's my favorite, but the waiting...oof!

As we are finally entering advent, we will hear the Christmas story told over the next few weeks leading up to Christmas Eve. We all know what happens then; Jesus is born! For now though, we are in a time of waiting, of needing patience, but most importantly, a time of preparation.

It is so much fun to put up decorations and lights, to make Christmas cookies, and shop for gifts. Ultimately, those things are the 'fluff' of the season. In this advent season, let us prepare our hearts and minds to welcome Jesus; to welcome love, kindness, mercy, justice, the stranger, the lost, and the hurting. This is exactly what *The House Is Bright* is beckoning us to do.

Holy God, we thank you for yet another season to welcome your Son. Help us to prepare our hearts to receive him and to reflect his love, kindness, mercy, and justice. In patience we wait.. Amen.

-Mason Fitch

The Days Are Surely Coming, Jeremiah 33:14-16

There's a Song in the Air

There's a song in the air!
There's a star in the sky!
There's a mother's deep prayer
and a baby's low cry!
And the star rains its fire
while the angel choirs sing,
For the manger of Bethlehem
cradles a king!

There's a tumult of joy
o'er the wonderful birth,
For the virgin's sweet boy
is the Lord of the earth.
See, the star rains its fire
while the angel choirs sing,
For the manger of Bethlehem
cradles a king!

We rejoice in the light,
and we echo the song
That comes down through the night
from the heavenly throng,
And we welcome the glorious
gospel they bring,
And we greet in the cradle
our savior and king.



Josiah G. Holland, 1879; Christmas Song, 66.66.12 12



December 2, 2024

Josiah G. Holland composed “There’s a Song in the Air” in 1872. I think he successfully describes in his carol the details of the night our Savior was born. We have a bright star leading the shepherds to the manger. There are glorious angels singing in the sky. There’s a baby lying in a manger, uttering a soft low cry. And most important of all, we recognize that we have been given a Savior of the world. Let us never lose sight of what this carol is describing. All of the hustle and bustle must never surpass the true meaning of Christmas.

One of the verses states,

*We rejoice in the light, and we echo the song
that comes down through the night from the heavenly throng,
and we welcome the glorious gospel they bring,
and we greet in the cradle our Savior and King.*

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son, our most precious Savior and Christ. Help remind us through the entire year of the priceless gift you have given us and help us share this gift with people we encounter. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

-Larry Weber

The Days Are Surely Coming, Jeremiah 33:14-16

It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year

It's the most wonderful time of the year
With the kids jingle belling
And everyone telling you be of good cheer
It's the most wonderful time of the year

It's the hap-happiest season of all
With those holiday greetings
and gay happy meetings
When friends come to call
It's the hap-happiest season of all

There'll be parties for hosting
Marshmallows for toasting
And caroling out in the snow
There'll be scary ghost stories
And tales of the glories of
Christmases long, long ago

It's the most wonderful time of the year
There'll be much mistltoeing
And hearts will be glowing
When loved ones are near
It's the most wonderful time of the year



December 3, 2024

The words of the song bring very vivid images to mind and allows us to recall favorite seasonal memories from our own lives.

- There's the huge snowflakes falling to the ground, covering the Earth in a glistening blanket. After that comes the crunch as you walk across the yard for the first time.
- Then there's those wonderful smells of the season – cookies fresh out of the oven, a fire burning in the fireplace, the fragrance of the tree in the living room.
- Then there's the sounds of the season – the choir singing Christmas hymns, children laughing, Christmas music playing while we shop and even volunteers ringing bells in front of the store.

What makes Christmas time the most wonderful time of the year, however, is never mentioned in the song. What makes it so special is the birth of baby Jesus. While all babies are a blessing and a gift from God, nothing can compare to the infant born in a manger more than 2000 years ago.

Dear Heavenly Father, Please be with us this holiday season. Even as we enjoy traditional sights and sounds and activities for this time of year, never let us lose sight of what really makes Christmas the most wonderful time of the year – the arrival of Jesus! In His precious name we pray, Amen.

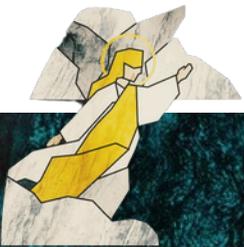
-Vickie Baker

The Days Are Surely Coming, Jeremiah 33:14-16

Come, O Long-expected Jesus

Come, o long-expected Jesus,
born to set your people free.
From our fears and sins release us;
Christ, in whom our rest shall be.
You, our strength and consolation,
come salvation to impart;
Dear desire of many a nation,
joy of many a longing heart.

Born your people to deliver,
born a child, and yet a king,
Born to reign in us forever,
born your gracious realm to bring.
By your own eternal Spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
By your all sufficient merit
raise us to your glorious throne.



Charles Wesley, 1744; Hyfrydol, 87.87.D

December 4, 2024

Written by Charles Wesley in 1744 and often sung to “Hyfrydol,” a Welsh tune written by Rowland Prichard, this hymn is recognized as an Advent hymn, or carol, due to the anticipatory nature of the words and phrases, its sense of urgency, and the minor prophetic basis from Haggai 2:7, which reads, “And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.” So how has this classic of Advent carols that calls through the generations touch and inspired me?

Until I got the note in the mail with the lyrics, I really wasn’t aware of it! However, what the carol does do is strip away the secular frills and bunting that often accompany “carols” and state with clarity the season and the celebration is, and should be, about the promise of the Risen Savior. Until we can get closer to God, until we can be free from fear of the unknown, until we can meet and walk in his countenance, there is an indescribable emptiness that can only be filled with this promise, this hope. As the “desire of every nation” references the desire for the reconstruction of the temple and the return of the people to Jerusalem, the longing of every Christian during the season of expectancy is the return of the Savior, and the anticipation of the fulfillment of the promises made, and kept, so long ago.

Our God and Father, we can hardly contain the anticipation that comes during this season of Advent and thank you for the unimaginable gift of life everlasting through your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

-Kevin Wolfe

The Days Are Surely Coming, Jeremiah 33:14-16

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming
from tender stem hath sprung,
Of Jesse's lineage coming
by faithful prophets sung;
It came a flow'ret bright,
Amid the cold of winter
when half spent 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 a-right
She bore to us a Savior
when half spent was the night.



German Carol, 15th Century; Es Ist Ein Ros, 76.76.676



December 5, 2024

This year, I looked out at my foot-high rose bush on the berm in front of our house. I had not pruned it; it was the end of Winter, almost Spring. I wasn't sure what to do so I cut it down to green stem and then cut out the dead. In a few weeks, we had the most beautiful bushes I had ever seen.

When I was asked to write this devotional on *Lo, How a Rose E're Blooming* I decided to focus on the rose. Not just the simple, extravagant beauty of the rose, but also the hardiness and the strength of the rose. This hymn has always been a favorite of mine, even when I was far too young to understand that there was symbolism and history behind the lyrics. The music was hauntingly beautiful and was at home played in a cathedral or a small chapel in the woods, quietly and beautifully, with or without words. Every time I hear it, a scene comes to my mind. But for the sake of this devotion, I would like to think about the rose in another way. I would like to think of a flower that is hardy, strong, and beautiful and can bloom even in adverse conditions.

The rose is the symbol of Christ in our world. Whether blooming under a blanket of snow or debris in the ruins of a school in Ukraine or beside a homeless child anywhere in this world, this wonderful tune is a universal language that affects all of us. It needs no interpreters but draws us in and leaves us with a stillness at the last note. It carries hope for the world, the world that God created.

Let the image of the rose's stillness in the cold midwinter remind us of advent and the hush of expectancy as we celebrate Christ's birth. Amen.

-Steve Peters

The Days Are Surely Coming, Jeremiah 33:14-16

Go Tell It on the Mountain

Chorus

Go, tell it on the mountain,
over the hills and everywhere;
Go, tell it on the mountain,
that Jesus Christ is born.

While shepherds kept their watching
o'er silent flocks by night,
Behold throughout the heavens
there shown a holy light.

Chorus

The shepherds feared and trembled,
when lo! Above the earth,
Rang out the angel chorus
that hailed the Savior's birth.

Chorus

Down in a lowly manger
the humble Christ was born,
And God sent us salvation
that blessed Christmas morn.

Chorus



December 6, 2024

I chose this hymn not because it's my favorite, but because it bothers me the most. The shepherds were overjoyed and told everyone they met the good news, the disciples were willing to die for their faith in Jesus, when all they had to do was renounce him and live. What about us? Why do we find it so hard to tell others about our Lord? As a young person I watched people in my church and what I saw, I liked. Their generosity, their kindness, their willingness to help others not only in their church but to those outside their group. That is what I see at First Christian – People coming together to help each other, to pray for one another, using our talents and resources to make a difference in our troubled world. I know that living self-controlled, upright and Godly lives in this present age is a witness in itself, but may we always give God the glory for sending Jesus to us to teach us how to love others and being empowered by the Spirit, we can obey Him and have the joy that the world can't give and can't take away.

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus to teach us how to live. Help us to be good witnesses and bring Glory to your name. Amen.

-Ilene Tegg

The Days Are Surely Coming, Jeremiah 33:14-16

Carol of the Bells

Hark how the bells, sweet silver bells
All seem to say throw cares away
Christmas is here bringing good cheer
To young and old meek and the bold
Ding, dong, ding, dong that is their song
With joyful ring all caroling
One seems to hear words of good cheer
From ev'rywhere filling the air
Oh how they pound raising the sound
O'er hill and dale telling their tale
Gaily they ring while people sing
Songs of good cheer Christmas is here
Merry, merry, merry, merry Christmas
Merry, merry, merry, merry Christmas
Ding dong ding dong ding



Mykola Leontovych, 1914; Shchedryk



December 7, 2024

If you happen to be near me when my phone signals a call, you will hear the Carol of the Bells (Leontovych/Wilhousky, 1914/1936). It's that important to me.

As I started thinking about this carol, I first asked myself, "What is the origin of the Carol of the Bells?" Turning to my constant reference source, Google, I found that "Carol of the Bells" is a popular Christmas carol, which is based on the Ukrainian New Year's song "Shchedryk." The music for the carol comes from the song written by the Ukrainian composer Mykola Leontovych in 1914; the English-language lyrics were written in 1936 by Peter Wilhousky.

Now that I have the backstory, I can speak of its importance to me. First, the music invites me into its realm: melody, movement, and anticipation of what comes next. The beat is compelling and draws me into the heart of the music. After being drawn in to listen to the beat of the music, I listen to the words. Those words, even though added later, are filled with joy, happiness, and warmth. In a world filled with war, despair, and hate, it is that joy of Christmas that calls to me. It is the birth of Jesus that fills us with hope, love, and kindness.

-Kathleen Wheeler

The Days Are Surely Coming, Jeremiah 33:14-16

Infant Holy, Infant Lowly

Infant holy, infant lowly,
for his bed a cattle stall;
Oxen lowing, little knowing,
Christ the babe is Lord of all.
Swiftly winging, angels singing,
bells are ringing, tidings bringing:
Christ the babe is Lord of all,
Christ the babe is Lord of all!

Flocks were sleeping, shepherds keeping
vigil till the morning new,
Saw the glory, heard the story
- tidings of a gospel true.
Thus rejoicing, free from sorrow,
praises voicing, greet the morrow:
Christ the babe was born for you,
Christ the babe was born for you!



December 8, 2024

Humans, angels, and even animals knew how incredibly special this tiny baby was. All were filled with complete joy. The infant was born to save us all and give us eternal life. Unfortunately, the life of Jesus ended far too soon, but that was the plan of God. Jesus was called “KING of the Jews.” King Herod became incredibly jealous of this young, new King.

What if Jesus had never been called “King”? Would Herod have been so angered? Would the populace have insisted on crucifying the man who came from such humble beginnings in a lowly stable? No one will ever know. What we do know is that the life of Jesus played out exactly according to God’s plan.

How did everyone know this small baby was so important? The wise men saw a star. The angels raised their voices in song. Shepherds kept vigil. Even the animals sensed the glorious uniqueness of this newly born child. It is truly amazing! Christ was born for all of us - for you and for me.

Dear Lord, Thank you for sending us your infant son to save us all and to give us everlasting life. Amen.

-Kate Spielman

Prepare the Way of the Lord, Luke 3:1-6

Christians All, Your Lord Is Coming

Christians all, your Lord is coming,
drawing near in holy birth.
Ring the bells and sound the trumpets,
let your music fill the earth.
Dance and move to show God's glory;
kneel and pause to hear God's word.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Rise and let your songs be heard.

Christians all, your Lord is coming,
calling you to serve in deed.
See the ones who hurt and suffer,
hear their cry and act with speed.
Set all selfish ways behind you.
Purge your hearts of sinful greed.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Christ in you will meet their need.

Christians all, your Lord is coming,
he will rise up from the dead.
Lift the cup, of sin forgiven;
bless the host and eat his bread.
Mend the ways where peace is broken,
give yourselves to true Shalom.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Dwell as one in church and home.

Christians all, your Lord is coming,
hope for peace is now at hand.
Let there be no hesitation,
walk in faith where life demands.
Bear the word that God has given;
share the birth that stirs your soul.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Christ will come and make you whole.



December 9, 2024

The Princess Bride is on my top ten of all time favorite movies because it rolls many different film genres into one movie. You've got action with the swashbuckling sword fight scenes. You've got drama with Inigo Montoya's quest to avenge his father's death. You've got horror with the Westley and Buttercup's trip through the fire swamp as they encounter rodents of unusual size. You've got comedy with Miracle Max. And of course, there's kissing in the story. The romance between Westley and Buttercup is the thread that weaves the whole story together.

Likewise, Christians All, Your Lord is Coming covers many different aspects of preparing for the birth of Jesus. We start with praise, ringing bells and sounding trumpets, dance and move to show God's glory. Then we move into putting faith into action by seeing those who hurt and suffer and acting with speed to help. The hymn moves on to the promises made in the newborn Christ, mending ways where peace is broken to give ourselves true Shalom. It ends with a call to be faithful and spread the message of Jesus by walking in faith while bearing the word and sharing the birth that stirs our soul.

We have many preparations ahead of us during Advent. There are many ways to connect with God and our neighbor, all wrapped up in this one holiday season celebrating the birth of our Lord. In the midst of all the hustle and bustle, be sure to take some time to listen for that small quiet voice, nudging you out of your comfort zone to a new way to serve God. When you hear it, just respond as Westley would in The Princess Bride, "As you wish".

-Mike Buckley

Prepare the Way of the Lord, Luke 3:1-6

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King:
peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
join the triumph of the skies;
with th'angelic hosts proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"

Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
late in time behold him come,
offspring of the Virgin's womb:
veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
hail th'incarnate Deity,
pleased in flesh with us to dwell,
Jesus, our Immanuel.
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by,
born that we no more may die,
born to raise us from the earth,
born to give us second birth.
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"



Charles Wesley, 1739, alt; Mendelssohn, 77.77D w/ refrain

December 10, 2024

One of my first memories of “Hark! The Herald Angles Sing”, was in “A Charlie Brown Christmas”. Charlie Brown was depressed because everyone around him was being selfish about Christmas. Everywhere he looked Christmas was becoming commercialized. Lucy suggests that he direct a neighborhood Christmas play to bring out the Christmas cheer. Naturally his peers did not cooperate and Charlie Brown was ready to give up when he decides to get a Christmas Tree, hoping that would bring some cheer. But the kids laughed and made fun of the tree. Their teasing caused Charlie Brown to ask loudly “Does anyone knows what Christmas is all about?” Linus then recites the “The Story of the Birth of Jesus”. The kids understand how their behavior has hurt Charlie Brown. They decorate the little tree with lights and start humming “Hark The Herald Angles Sing”. When Charlie Brown returns, they all shout “Merry Christmas Charlie Brown!” and sing “Hark The Herald Angles Sing”. As the snow falls, we understand that the kids have learned the true meaning of Christmas through all the hustle and bustle of the holidays.

Like Charlie Brown we don't always feel that merry during the Christmas season. The burdens of the world around us are hard to ignore. Many feel more stress to get everywhere and do everything before December 25th. But it is verse 3 of this beloved Christmas carol that lets us know that the miracle of Jesus birth is not over.

*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.*

The night that the angles sang “Glory to the new-born King”, we also received the promise of healing, the promise of eternal life, and that his birth gave us the promise that he would come again. When that time comes the Herald Angles will once again Harken us to Sing “Glory to the Re-born King”.

Lord, as we enter the Christmas season may we remember that birth of Jesus is more than a story. It is a miracle that never ends. His birth should be celebrated for the hope it brings to each of us. Let us not forget the promises that were given and the great sacrifices that were made so we may witness the Angles announcing the second coming of Jesus.

-Cindy Bridges

Prepare the Way of the Lord, Luke 3:1-6

Good Christian Friends, Rejoice

Good Christian friends, rejoice
with heart and soul and voice!
Listen now to what we say: News! News!
Jesus Christ is born today.
Ox and ass before him bow,
and he is in the manger now.
Christ is born today! Christ is born today!

Good Christian friends, rejoice
with heart and soul and voice!
Now you hear of endless bliss: Joy! Joy!
Jesus Christ is born for this!
He has opened heaven's door,
and we are blest for evermore.
Christ was born for this! Christ was born for this!

Good Christian friends, rejoice
with heart and soul and voice!
Now you need not fear the grave: Peace! Peace!
Jesus Christ was born to save!
Calls you one and calls you all,
to gain the everlasting hall.
Christ was born to save! Christ was born to save!



December 11, 2024

And behold there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, . . . And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus . . . he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, 'Now Lord, Thou does let Thy bondservant depart in peace according to Thy word. For my eyes have seen Thy salvation.'

Luke 2:25, 27-30

When I chose this particular Christmas song, I couldn't help but think about Simeon who is spoken of in Luke. Can you imagine the joy he felt when he was able to take into his arms the One whom he had looked for, the promised One, the Messiah of Israel? How his heart must have leaped as he said, "For my eyes have seen Thy salvation."

Good Christian Friends, Rejoice with heart and soul and voice!

Behind every song, there is a story. This hymn goes back many centuries. The words were written by a Dominican monk by the name of Heinrich Suso. He lived in a time when darkness and poverty and hopelessness were the facts of everyday life. Although he was born into a family that would have made him part of the ruling class, he chose the priesthood because of his great concern for the common man and his suffering. He attempted in his ministry to lift the spirits of the people — people who he knew had very little to cause them to rejoice.

This was not the normal ministry of the church at that time, so Suso suffered persecution for his service of worship. However, this did not derail this determined man. He continued until his death to reach the common man with his song and its message.

As Simeon rejoiced so did Heinrich Suso. And so have many listeners and singers of this traditional hymn down through the ages. What a wonderful message to ponder in the midst of a fallen world . . . this message of Christmas: Now ye need not fear the grave; Jesus Christ was born to save!

-Connie Sinn

Prepare the Way of the Lord, Luke 3:1-6

'Twas in the Moon of Wintertime

'Twas in the moon of wintertime, when all the birds had fled,
that mighty Gitchi Manitou Sent angel choirs instead;
Before their light the stars grew dim,
and wand'ring hunters heard the hymn:
Peace on earth, Christ is born, Jesus is born, In excelsis gloria.

Within a lodge of broken bark the tender babe was found;
a ragged robe of rabbit skin enwrapped His beauty 'round;
but as the hunter braves drew nigh,
the angel song rang loud and high:
Peace on earth, Christ is born, Jesus is born, In excelsis gloria.

The earliest moon of wintertime is not so round and fair
as was the ring of glory on the helpless infant there.
The chiefs from far before him knelt
with gifts of fox and beaver pelt.
Peace on earth, Christ is born, Jesus is born, In excelsis gloria.

Oh children of the forest free, the angel song is true;
the holy child of earth and heav'n is born today for you.
Come kneel before the radiant boy,
who brings you beauty, peace and joy.
Peace on earth, Christ is born, Jesus is born, In excelsis gloria.



Jean de Brebeuf, c. 1643

Jesous Ahatonhia
86.86.88 w/refrain

December 12, 2024

Not an adult with baggage, history and regret; but as an innocent child. Haven't you ever wanted to be a fresh, young child and go with the shepherds to find the babe?

Eager, searching through the evening of mystery for the awe of holy encounter. Haven't you ever wanted that?

To find the Christ-child and know in the moment, this one is for you, too. Yes and you are complete, loved, and true.

This discovery was exactly what the French Jesuit missionary, Jean de Brébeuf, wanted for the Huron people of Canada in the 1600's. He retold the story of Christmas in this carol in a way that these Native North Americans would understand and own for themselves.

Great God, "Gitchi Manitou," was the source. The manger scene became "a lodge of broken bark" and swaddling clothes, "a ragged robe of rabbit skin." Note the alliteration so the sound is pleasant to sing and easy to remember.

The Christ-child, "the radiant boy" gives the gifts of "beauty, peace and joy." This carol is evangelism at its best for it respects the audience's culture and value while telling about Jesus' love. It was ten years before Father de Brébeuf baptized the first Huron believer. He ultimately gave his life for this ministry as he was killed in 1649 by Iroquois raiders. Who with patient, listening respect might you reach out to this Christmas?

-Randy Williams

Prepare the Way of the Lord, Luke 3:1-6

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.

For Christ is born of Mary,
and gathered all above
while mortals sleep, the angels keep
their watch of wond'ring love.
O morning stars, together
proclaim the holy birth.
Your voices raise to God in praise;
and peace to all on earth.

How silently, how silently
the wondrous gift is giv'n!
So God imparts to human hearts
the joys of highest heav'n.
No ear may hear Christ 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 God, Emmanuel!



Phillips Brooks, 1868, alt; St. Louis 86.86.76.86

December 13, 2024

Bethlehem was a small quiet village when Jesus was born. It had a proud heritage of being the birthplace of King David. A small, peaceful farming village known as the ‘house of bread.’ When King Herod heard a new king had been born in Bethlehem, he terrorized the village by ordering all the infant males in the area killed. Warned by the Lord, Joseph and Mary had already left for Egypt with their son, Jesus.

The story of Jesus’ birth is a reminder of how quickly the quiet and peacefulness of life can become chaos, fear, and heartbreak. Little did Bethlehem know that a King had been born in their village. This King would eventually bring Peace to all, but it would be a long time for that to happen (if ever in this life).

In biblical times, Jerusalem and Bethlehem were a few miles apart. Today, Jerusalem is expanding so that the two almost join. Going from one to the other is hardly noticeable, except for the 26 ft. tall concrete wall (twice the height of the Berlin Wall) separating Israel from the West Bank (Palestinian territory). The ‘separation wall’ is covered with artwork depicting calls for peace, rebellion, justice, etc. Sadly, one must pass through a checkpoint to enter Bethlehem which is in Palestinian territory today.

As we sing this song we can dream of the small quiet village that David and Jesus knew and think of the hopes and fears of those living there now as well as our own. From the dark streets of Bethlehem came the “everlasting light” – “O come to us, abide with us, our God, Emmanuel!”

Our prayer remains: an everlasting peace on earth for all.

-Frank Wheeler

Prepare the Way of the Lord, Luke 3:1-6

Alfie, the Christmas Tree/It's in Every One of Us

SPOKEN

Did you ever hear the story of the Christmas tree
Who just didn't want to change the show
He liked living in the woods and playing with squirrels
He liked icicles and snow
He liked wolves and eagles and grizzly bears
And critters and creatures that crawled
Why bugs were some of his very best friends
Spiders and ants and all
Now that's not to say that he ever looked down
On a vision of twinkled lights
Or on mirrored bubbles and peppermint canes
And a thousand other delights
And he often had dreams of tiny reindeer
And a jolly old man in a sleigh Full of toys
and presents and wonderful things
And a story of Christmas Day
Oh, Alfie believed in Christmas alright
He was full of Christmas cheer
All of each and every day
And all throughout the year
To him it was more than a special time
Much more than a special day
It was more than a beautiful story
It was a special kind of way
You see some folks have never heard a jingle bell ring
And they've never heard of Santa Claus
They've never heard the story of the Son of God
That made Alfie pause
Did that mean that they'd never know of peace on Earth?
Or the Brotherhood of Man?
Or know how to love? Or know how to give?
If they can't no one can
You see, life is a very special kind of thing
Not just for a chosen few
But for each and every living, breathing thing
Not just me and you
So when you're at Christmas prayers this year
Alfie asked me if I'd ask you
Say a prayer for the wind and the water and the wood
And those who live there too

It's in every one of us to be wise
Find your heart,
open up both your eyes
We can all know everything
without ever knowing why
It's in every one of us, by and by

It's in every one of us to be wise
Find your heart,
open up both your eyes
We can all know everything
without ever knowing why
It's in every one of us,
by and by, By and by



David Pomeranz, 1975

December 14, 2024

One of my favorite musicians is John Denver. And I really love the Muppets. When they teamed up and did a Christmas special in 1979, I was so excited! And it was everything I could have wanted! This song about Alfie was done on that show.

Alfie wondered about the folks who had never heard the sounds we like at Christmas...jingle bells, HoHoHo, and so much more. They had never seen all the wonderful twinkling lights, candy canes, decorations, etc. And most importantly, they had never heard the story of the Son of God.

I can't imagine my life without the Christmas story playing a major role. I love Advent and all the special preparations – especially the music. On Christmas Eve when we sing Silent Night by candlelight, I remember so many other Christmas Eves and all the specialness of them. At one church we served, no one wanted to go home after the late service...every year!! It was after midnight and everyone was visiting. It was our chance to see those who returned home for Christmas. The hugs were great!!

Alfie was a Christmas tree. But he really didn't want to leave his spot in the woods. All the critters and creatures were his friends. I have left my friends and experienced a new Christmas Eve when we would be at a new church. I really didn't want to leave the previous church, but God knew better than I did that the move would be just right. And it always was.

On a side note, one of my favorite books is Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol". The Muppets have a wonderful movie called The Muppet Christmas Carol, based on Dickens' work. I watch it every year, several times.

Take a break this Christmas and gather the family to watch this wonderful holiday story. Remember your Christmases and think about what Christmas means to you. Can you imagine Christmas without knowing the story of the birth of Jesus?

Loving God, open our hearts to memories of the story of your son's birth. Give us opportunities to share our memories with those who need to hear them.
Amen.

-Linda Williams

Prepare the Way of the Lord, Luke 3:1-6

Down to Earth

Down to earth as a dove,
came to all, holy love;
Jesus Christ from above
bringing great salvation,
meant for every nation.
Let us sing, sing, sing
dance and spring, spring, spring
Christ is here, ever near!
Gloria in excelsis.

This is love came to light,
now is fear put to flight.
God defeats evil's blight,
giving for our sorrows,
hope of new tomorrows.
Let us sing, sing, sing
dance and spring, spring, spring
Christ is here, ever near!
Gloria in excelsis.

Jesus Christ comes to feed
hungry ones in their need;
in the house there is bread:
Jesus in the stable,
in the church a table.
Let us sing, sing, sing
dance and spring, spring, spring
Christ is here, ever near!
Gloria in excelsis.



December 15, 2024

When I was “assigned” this hymn for this year’s devotional booklet, my first reaction was that I had never heard of it before. But then, I found it right there on page 168 of the Chalice Hymnal. Since the Chalice Hymnal has been the only hymnal I have used for the past 30 years, there is no doubt that I have seen it before. But, clearly, I had never paid much attention to it, and I don’t remember ever singing it either.

My first reaction as I read through it was that it doesn’t sound like most of the Christmas carols I am familiar with. There isn’t any mention of angels, or shepherds, or stars, or magi. Rather, it is about fear being “put to flight,” feeding the hungry ones in their need, singing, dancing, and springing.

This led me to try to find some backstory behind this hymn, but I couldn’t find any. I did, however, find some information on the hymn’s author, Fred Kaan. He pastored in England but was born in the Netherlands in 1929. As a result, his family was greatly affected by the Second World War. According to hymnary.org, his family lived through the Nazi occupation; he saw three of his grandparents die of starvation, and he also witnessed his parents’ deep involvement in the resistance movement. They also took in refugees during the war. It was only in his teens that he began attending church, and out of his experiences, he became a pacifist.

Based on his life experience, it is no surprise to me that “Down to Earth” went in the direction that it did. The lyrics of this hymn may not focus on a night 2000 years ago, but it does focus on the hope that Jesus’s birth brings here and now.

One of my concerns in our Christmas celebrations is that while it is understandable that we focus on the baby Jesus in a manger, there is also a temptation to leave him there. The powerful imagery of a holy night can overwhelm our understanding of why Jesus came to earth. This hymn, “Down to Earth,” puts Jesus’s birth into perspective and reminds us that he was born into this world for a very real purpose: to bring hope and salvation to a broken world. I appreciate Fred Kaan’s reminder. If, like me, you are unfamiliar with this hymn, I encourage you to check it out.

-Hank Anderson

Do Not Be Afraid, Luke 1:26-35

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, rich and poor, 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.



William C. Dix, c. 1865;
Greensleeves, 87.87 w/refrain

December 16, 2024

I dare say that many mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and dear friends have thought of the first two sentences of this song, inserting their own name, when they first held their beloved newborn or adopted child. I see that as a tribute to God for delivering a gift as special to them as Jesus was to Mary. Also, there is something extremely comforting about shepherds guarding us and angels singing for us, as they did for Jesus in the song.

I know I have felt times when I know I am being guarded by, nudged by, cared by, and rejoiced by powers greater than me. So, let us "haste, haste to bring him laud, the Babe, the Son of Mary".

Thank you God for "Christ, the King" and the miracle of Christmas that recurs annually if we just open our hearts to it. Amen.

-Sandy Surface

Do Not Be Afraid, Luke 1:26-35

While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks

While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
all seated on the ground,
The messenger of God came down,
and glory shone around, and glory shone around.

"Fear not," the angel said for dread
had seized their troubled mind,
"glad tidings of great joy I bring
to all of humankind, to all of humankind.

"To you, in David's town this day,
is born of David's line
a Savior, who is Christ, the Lord,
and this shall be the sign, and this shall be the sign:

"The heavenly Babe you there shall find
to human view displayed,
all meanly wrapped in swathing bands,
and in a manger laid, and in a manger laid."

Thus spake the seraph, and forthwith
appeared a shining throng
of angels praising God, who thus
addressed their joyful song, addressed their joyful song:

"All glory be to God on high
and on the earth be peace;
Goodwill henceforth from heaven to earth
begin and never cease, begin and never cease."



Nahum Tate, 1700, alt; Christmas



December 17, 2024

I've always been curious why the angel announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds in the field. They probably weren't considered to be all that "important" in society. Wouldn't it have been more "impactful" to announce it to the religious leaders of the time....or to those in power or in control? Or announce it in one of the major cities where lots of people could see it? Why would anyone care....or even believe....what a bunch of lowly shepherds heard or saw, or even what they thought they saw?

Setting aside for a minute the biblical prophesies of the coming of the Lord, we might look at what it takes to be a good shepherd. First, they cared deeply about their flocks, ALL of them. They would risk their lives to defend them against dangerous animals or anyone that might harm them. Second, they had to be diligent and patient, looking after their flocks throughout the night, constantly on watch to protect them through bad weather or from just wandering off. And last, they had to be seen as a leader and be able to communicate all of that to a bunch of animals! They had to earn their trust so they would follow them.

So I guess it's not really surprising that the angel announced the coming of the "good shepherd" to a group of people who could truly appreciate what being a shepherd is all about! Jesus demonstrated all the skills and characteristics of being a shepherd throughout his ministry, steering his flock away from danger and towards the Kingdom of Heaven!

Thank you Lord for being our "good shepherd". It is an amazing comfort to know that You are always there and always looking after us!! Amem.

-Roger Baker

Do Not Be Afraid, Luke 1:26-35

Away in a Manger

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.
The stars in the sky looked down where he lay,
the little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
but little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.
I love Thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky,
and stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask Thee to stay
close by me forever, and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care,
and fit us for heaven, to live with thee there.



Anonymous, 19th century;
Away in a Manger, 11 11.11 11

December 18, 2024

I think of *Away in a Manger* as being the true Christmas carol, for it tells the story of Baby Jesus.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. -Luke 2:4-7

In 1965, our parents lived in Indiana and would visit every few weeks and when they did, our children had a skit planned for them. That Christmas, the children were 2,7,11, and 12. They were ready with a skit entitled “Baby Jesus”. The room was dimly lit, the 12 year old, the Innkeeper, played *Away in the Manger* on the piano while our son, who was Joseph, pushed a box to the “stage”.

In the box was the 2 year old, curled up and wrapped in a towel, and the 7 year old, Mary, was beside the box. The Innkeeper and Joseph were arguing about a room when the 2 year old, crying, yelled, “I don’t want to be Baby Jesus”. She threw the towel off and ran crying to Grandma’s arms. The skit had ended quickly.

Whenever I hear that carol, I think about that evening and also wonder if the baby in the manger ever wanted to cry out, “I don’t want to be Baby Jesus”! In His name! Amen.

-Carney Lewis

Do Not Be Afraid, Luke 1:26-35

The First Noel

The first Noel, 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.

Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,
born is the King of Israel.

They looked up and saw 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.

Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,
born is the King of Israel.

And by the light of that same star
three wise men came from country far;
to seek for a king was their intent,
and to follow the star wherever it went.

Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,
born is the King of Israel.

This star drew nigh to the northwest,
o'er Bethlehem it took its rest,
and there it did both stop and stay,
right over the place where Jesus lay.

Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,
born is the King of Israel.

Then entered in those wise men three,
full reverently upon their knee,
and offered there, in his presence,
their gold and myrrh and frankincense.

Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,
born is the King of Israel.

Traditional English Carol, 17th century;
The First Noel, irr. w/refrain



December 19, 2024

The hymn “The First Noel” beautifully recounts the story of the birth of Jesus Christ, a moment that brought hope and salvation to all humanity. As we reflect on the lyrics, we are reminded of the humble beginnings of our Savior, born in a manger, and the joyous proclamation of His birth by the angels to the shepherds. This event signifies God’s immense love for us, transcending all boundaries of gender, race, and social status. In Christ, we find a unifying love that calls us to embrace one another as brothers and sisters, celebrating our diversity as a reflection of God’s creation.

In our daily lives, let us strive to embody the message of “The First Noel” by extending kindness and compassion to everyone we encounter. Just as the shepherds and wise men from different walks of life came together to worship the newborn King, we too are called to come together in unity and love. Let us be mindful of the ways we can support and uplift each other, recognizing that in Christ, there is no division. Our faith calls us to be peacemakers and bridge-builders, reflecting the inclusive love of Jesus in our actions and words.

As we meditate on the birth of Jesus, let us also remember the hope and light He brings into our lives. The star that guided the wise men to Bethlehem is a symbol of the guidance and direction we receive from God. In times of uncertainty and darkness, we can look to Jesus as our guiding light, leading us towards peace, joy, and eternal life. May the story of “The First Noel” inspire us to live out our faith with courage and grace, sharing the good news of Christ’s love with all people, regardless of their background or circumstances.

-Laura Cohen/Shannon Yost

Do Not Be Afraid, Luke 1:26-35

Rejoice! God is With Us

Rejoice! God is with us, let praises resound;
the way of salvation through flesh has been found.
The advent of Jesus has banished the night;
God broke through the darkness and turned it to light!

Now hear this, all you who are lonely and blue;
what prophets have promised is proven and true.
His coming has happened; no more must we wait.
Break forth into joy and with songs celebrate!

He tenderly reaches to those who are lost,
brings blessings and pardon and counts not the cost.
The bonds of oppression are shattered and torn,
the fractures are mended, the faithless reborn.

Rejoice! God is with us, make known to the earth
through love and the splendor of Bethlehem's birth.
O marvelous coming, miraculous thing,
by way of a manger - our Savior and King!



Daniel B. Merrick, 1978; St. Denio, 11.11.11

December 20, 2024

Every fall, my husband would write a new Christmas carol that would be used in our family Christmas card for that year. He would include a suggestion of a familiar hymn or carol tune that it could be sung to; but the words themselves were presented as poetry. Poems are read more slowly than carols are sung. This gives us a chance to linger over phrases that reach out and touch us in new ways. This is true for all the carols used in this devotional. We may think we know the words to familiar carols but when we read them as poetry, they become meaningful in a different way.

This year, as I read “Rejoice, God is With Us”, I hear in Dan’s words the joy of what God has done for us and continues to do for us. This is what I celebrate on Christmas Eve as I join others in worship. It is a joy to be in church on Christmas Eve. I want to be with the people who I know and love...the people of both Glen Oak Christian Church and First Christian Church. God IS with us. We see Christ in the faces of those around us.

Lord, open our eyes to see you as we celebrate your birth this season. Amen.

-Dagmar Merrick

Do Not Be Afraid, Luke 1:26-35

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,
sing, all ye citizens 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!

Child, for us sinners poor and in the manger,
we would embrace thee, with love and awe;
who would not love thee, loving us so dearly?
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 for our salvation,
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!



John Francis Wade, 1743;
Adeste Fideles, Irr. w/refrain



December 21, 2024

In the US our society has fully embraced the idea of democracy and has rejected the concept of a monarchy. So it may be hard for us to understand the excitement and devotion people may feel for a King.

But the people of Israel and Judah had longed for a King since the days of Moses. And not just any King but one who fully represented the will of God. After a long line of oppressive and inferior rulers, all hope seemed lost.

But then a revelation - a new King, not just of Israel but a King of Heaven and Earth, was born. And a royal invitation to the people, come and meet your new King

So come ye faithful, come to Bethlehem and meet the new King of Earth and Heaven; begotten of God to be the true ruler of humanity. Come let us adore Him.

-John Best

Do Not Be Afraid, Luke 1:26-35

I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day

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

I thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along th'unbroken song
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."

Till, ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day
A voice, a chime, a chant sublime,
Of peace on earth, good will to men.



Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1863;
Waltham, 8.8.8.8 L.M.

December 22, 2024

Think of the bells you have heard in your lifetime. Think about the sound each made and the memory each brings to mind. Sleigh bells, school bells, cowbells (hockey), camp dinner bells and the I beat cancer bell are a few that bring memories for me. The nightly carillon music that rang out over my childhood neighborhood from my home church had an allure that reached my soul.

Throughout history, bells have been rung for a variety of reasons. For one man in the 19th century, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, bells became the inspiration for a poem. A poem he wrote on Christmas Day during the American Civil War. Longfellow's first wife died from a miscarriage after just four years of marriage. His second wife with whom he had six children died from burns after her Victorian dress caught fire. Their third child, a girl, died as a toddler. Longfellow's oldest son had a near fatal wound as a soldier in the Civil War. While caring for his injured son, Longfellow wrote a poem titled, "Christmas Bells" on Christmas Day 1863. That poem became the inspiration for the familiar carol we know as "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day." Through his losses and difficult times, Longfellow's faith in God carried him when he most needed to hear, to feel God. In the book I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day, Lloyd and Karmel Newell wrote "the bells of Christmas still rang with the promise of hope and peace and life eternal."

This Christmas, listen for the bells. Close your eyes and wrap yourself in memories of Christmas bells. Share those memories with those you love. Perhaps Clarence was right and "every time a bell rings an angel gets his wings" or maybe every time a bell rings our thoughts turn to cherished time with God, family and friends.

Lord, a single bell tolling is simple but powerful as it reaches many ears. Jesus' birth was humble and unpretentious, simple in way, yet so powerful. Be with us as we share the story of Jesus' birth. Help us to reach many ears, many hearts. Be with us as we tell of peace on earth, good will to men. I pray everyone hears "the promise of hope and peace and life eternal" when the church bells ring. Keeping Jesus in our hearts this Christmas and always, Amen.

-Connie Julien

Sing Praises to the Lord, Isaiah 12:2-6

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
Christ, who comes in lowly birth.
Come, adore on bended knee
Jesus, joy of heav'n and earth.
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

See with-in a manger laid,
Christ, whom choirs of angels praise;
Mary, Joseph, lend your aid,
while our hearts in love we raise.
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!



Traditional French Carol;
Gloria, 77.77 w/refrain

December 23, 2024

Was it a night like this?

Was it a night like this
where a spotless night sky
held court O'er fields of grass
shimmering and rippling gently
as the wind moved across the plains?
When delight was found
in the dance of moonlight beams
filtering down
from a dark night sky?

Was it a night like this
where silence was pure,
and the firepit crackled and sizzled,
and thoughts roamed free.
When the heavens broke open
and your eyes could do nothing
but look to the skies in amazement,
and your ears filled with such glorious sound
your ears ached.
Did your heart throb?
Did your knees give way?
Did you murmur under your breath,
Gloria, in excelsis Deo—
because it still filled your ears and your mind, and your very soul—
when you beheld the child?

On a night like this
in my own little corner of the world,
I go to my window and look to the sky
And I remember a night
That was...
...extraordinary...
...wonderful...
...marvelous...
...and I sing, soft and low, Gloria, in excelsis Deo...

-Be Gibson

Sing Praises to the Lord, Isaiah 12:2-6

Silent Night

Joseph Mohr, 1818; Stille Nacht, irr.

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,
shepherds quake at the sight,
glories stream from heaven afar,
heav'nly hosts sing, alleluia;
Christ, the Savior, is born!
Christ, the Savior, is born!"

Silent night, holy night,
Son of God, love's pure light
radiant beams from thy holy face,
with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

Silent night, holy night,
wondrous star, lend thy light;
with the angels let us sing,
alleluia to our King;
Christ, the Savior, is born,
Christ, the Savior, is born!



December 24, 2024

Blessed are the peacemakers, or they will be called children of God.
-Matthew 5:9

The church in which I was raised had a decidedly German background. Many Germans had come to the South Side of Peoria seeking a better life and Rev. F. W. Jass had brought his family to Peoria in the 1890s to establish Christ Lutheran Church as a mission of Trinity Lutheran Church. The family brought with them a rich variety of hymns and traditions. Our grade school teachers taught us how to follow Jesus, how to be good sports, how to sing hymns in harmony (a few in German), and even the European tradition of dancing around a Maypole.

The climax of the Christmas Eve pageant each year was singing Silent Night. The hymn had started as a poem written in 1816 by Josef Mohr, a Catholic priest from Oberndorf, Austria and set to music for a Christmas Eve service in 1818 by Franz Xaver Gruber. It was named “Stille Nacht” to commemorate the coming of peace after the chaos of the Napoleonic wars in Europe.

The words of Silent Night reflect the idea of a newborn baby resting on His mother’s breast, recalling with simple statements the profundity of the birth of Jesus. The third stanza meditates on the divinity of the Christ Child and the mystery of the incarnation. Silent Night is still timely today in a world rife with war. Sadly, we still need divine help to attain peace and justice!

Let us pray: Lord, in the spirit of “Stille Nacht” going into 2025, we pray for peace, specifically for a cease fire and peace for the people of the Middle East. We also pray for the defeat of the aggressor in Ukraine and peace for its people. Give our leaders wisdom and good will as they work toward peace in our times. Amen

-Becky Sisk

Good News of Great Joy, Luke 2:1-14

Joy to the World

Isaac Watts, 1719;
Antioch, CM w/ repeat

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
let every 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 world, the Savior reigns!
Let all 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.



December 25, 2024

“Joy to the world! The Lord is come! Let earth receive her King...” the congregation sang as we stood for the opening hymn. It was Christmas Eve, and I was standing in the row with my family - everyone except my father. We had learned that he was not coming home from his out-of-state job this Christmas. Sure, he had missed my birthday and some other minor occasions, but he had never failed to make it home for Christmas. So as the congregation sang this beautiful hymn with joy, teardrops plopped down on my hymnbook. I didn't feel much joy at that time and the disparity I heard in the jubilant tones around me was jarring.

It would be years later when I was in seminary that I learned Isaac Watts, who wrote the poem on which this hymn is based, never envisioned it as a Christmas carol. In fact, Jesus' coming to which Watts referred was his second and not his first. Watts interpreted Psalm 98 in light of Jesus' triumphant return when he would rule over the whole world.

Enter Lowell Mason, nearly a century later. Mason put Watts' poem to music, using snippets of Handel's Messiah. He introduced this new hymn, Joy to the World, at Christmas time, thus making it one of the most beloved carols. So, whether one considers Jesus' advent or his triumphant return, both give us reason to hope.

I learned something that December years ago: joy is not limited to one day on the calendar. But rather, Christ's coming to earth long ago, his presence now through the Holy Spirit, and his coming again to “rule the world with truth and grace,” are always reasons to celebrate even when life is difficult – especially then.

No matter what you are facing this Christmas Day, my prayer is that you can find joy and hope in Christ our Lord.

-Deann Anderson

Good News of Great Joy, Luke 2:1-14

Notes...





**Merry
Christmas!**

